Legends of Localization

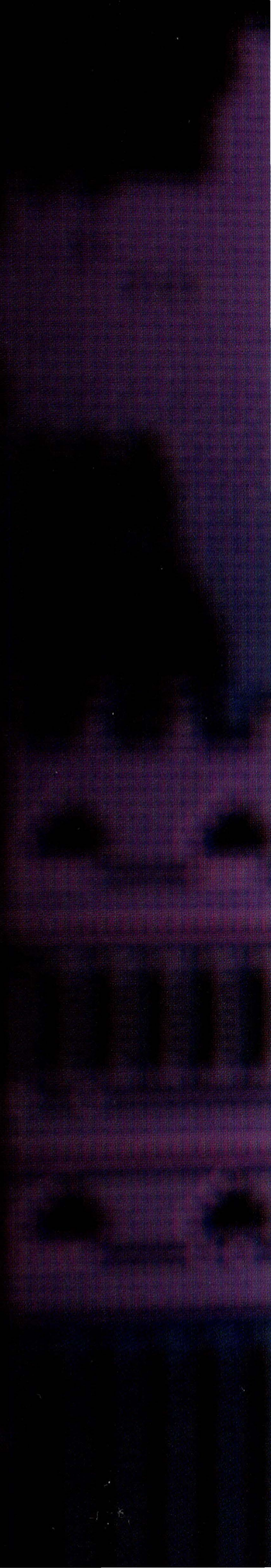
Book 3:
UNDERTALE

Clyde Mandelin

ローカライズの伝説

第三巻　UNDERTALE（アンダーテイル）

クライド・マンデリン



Legends of Localization
Book 3: UNDERTALE

1ST EDITION – NOVEMBER 2022

Legends of Localization is an examination of the cultural influences and differences that affect Japanese and English games. This book is an educational, history-focused exploration of the *Undertale* video game, but this book is not official *Undertale* merchandise in any form.

Certain portions of this book's content (and the localization information on many other games) is freely available online at: http://LegendsOfLocalization.com

Undertale is copyright 2015-2022 Toby Fox. All content created by or licensed to Fangamer LLC in collaboration with Clyde Mandelin, including graphics, photographs, layout and text, are copyright 2022 Fangamer LLC and Clyde Mandelin.

This work may not be reproduced without express written permission, except for excerpts intended for review.

Legends of Localization Book 3: Undertale is designed, published, sold and distributed by Fangamer and printed in China by Shanghai Offset Printing.

ISBN 978-1-945908-01-9

CONTRIBUTORS

Clyde Mandelin
Concept, Writing, Research

Brian Carmody
Art Direction, Design, Layout, Visual Display Photography

Heidi Mandelin
Producer, Photography, Purchasing, Research Assistant

Reid Young
Assistant Producer, Asgore look-alike

Dan Moore
Editing, Copywriting

Nina Matsumoto
Illustrations, International Communication

heavenchai
Research Assistant, Game Advisor

Everdraed
Image Editing and Manipulation

O.G. San
Stock Photo Guy, Book Tour Companion

However, many more people helped with this book's creation. CHECK the Special Thanks section in the back of the book for a full list.

Fan-produced media contained in this book are utilized with permission, are properly licensed, and/or are commissioned works.

Other externally sourced media contained in this book, including video game screenshots, are utilized under the following criteria for Fair Use: 1. Utilized copyrighted material is fundamentally transformative in nature and used for educational and illustrative purposes; 2. Utilized copyrighted material is from a publicly available published work; 3. Utilized copyrighted material is of minimal amount and minimal substantiality; 4. Utilized copyrighted material does not deprive the copyright owner of income, potential for income, or freedom of controlling ownership.

SEKAI NO OWARI photograph by Space Shower Network., CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

Gyaru photograph by MartaJobani, CC BY-SA 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

Japanese Reading Guide

Japanese Letter	Rough Pronunciation
a	Similar to “ah”
e	Similar to “eh”
i	Similar to “ee” in “bee”
o	Similar to “oh”
u	Similar to “ooh”
g	Similar to “g” in “go”
tsu	Similar to “ts” in “cats”

※NOTE: A short line above a vowel indicates that the vowel should be held a bit longer

Understanding First-Person, Second-Person, and Third-Person

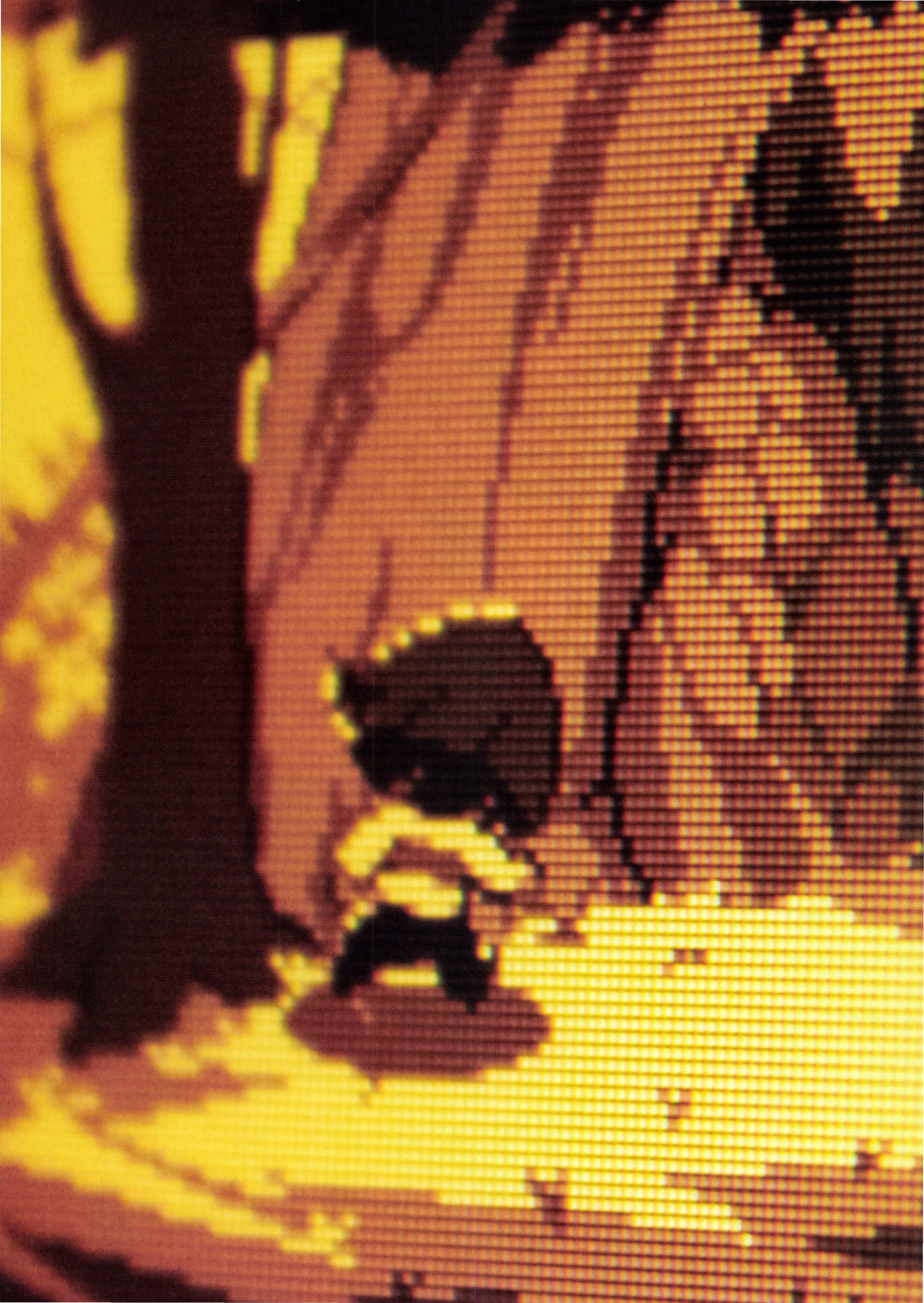
First-person perspective	When talking about yourself First-person pronoun examples: I, me, us, we
Second-person perspective	When talking about the listener Second-person pronoun example: you
Third-person perspective	When talking about someone else Third-person pronoun examples: he, she, it, they

Contents

8 Introduction
14 What is Localization?
36 History
58 Getting it Localized
72 Starting the Game
80 Ruins
106 Snowdin
156 Waterfall
184 Hotland
214 The Core
224 New Home
230 True Lab
236 Final Battles
252 Ending
260 Final Thoughts

UNDER

TALE™



Introduction

Introduction

Have you ever played a video game, watched a movie, or read a book and wondered what it was like in its original language? Or have you ever wondered how your favorite game, movie, or book sounds in a different language? Welcome to the world of *Legends of Localization*!

In this book, we'll take a detailed look at the popular American video game known as *Undertale*. We‘ll compare the original English version of the game with its official Japanese release. We'll also look at some of the translation challenges involved, and the solutions that were used to overcome them.

Along the way, we'll examine other related topics, such as:

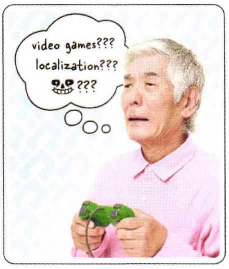
- What "localization" is and how it differs from translation
- *Undertale's* history and the inspirations behind the game
- *Undertale's* localization process as seen from the inside
- Common problems and mistakes in entertainment localization
- How culture and language shape a game's localization and vice-versa
- How unofficial, volunteer-made localizations and official localizations interact, how they differ, and what they mean to fans

Some of this might sound like dry, boring academic material, but don't worry – it'll be a genuinely fun and enlightening journey. After all, how do bad knock-knock jokes and skeleton puns even work in Japanese? Do they just get lost in translation? Let's find out!

Newcomers Welcome

Although this book analyzes the English and Japanese versions of *Undertale* and touches on topics that will surely delight *Undertale* fans, it's also been designed with general audiences in mind. Everything in this book is explained in clear, simple English for readers who know nothing about *Undertale*, video games, the Japanese language, or translation.

Basically, whatever your background is, you'll come away from this book with a deeper understanding of language, culture, and translation.


video games???
localization???
???

If you don't know the first thing about games, translation, Japanese, or *Undertale*, no worries!

Concerning Spoilers

Undertale is full of surprises, branching story routes, and endings. Every playthrough feels unique and memorable – especially your first one. For this reason, spoilers can greatly affect the gameplay experience.

If you're already an *Undertale* fan, then you're probably familiar with the story's many twists. But if you've never played it before and plan to someday, keep in mind that portions of this book will naturally contain spoilers.

Although this book wasn't designed as a gameplay supplement, you probably could read through it as you play the game. Who knows, it could even add a new perspective to the gameplay experience!

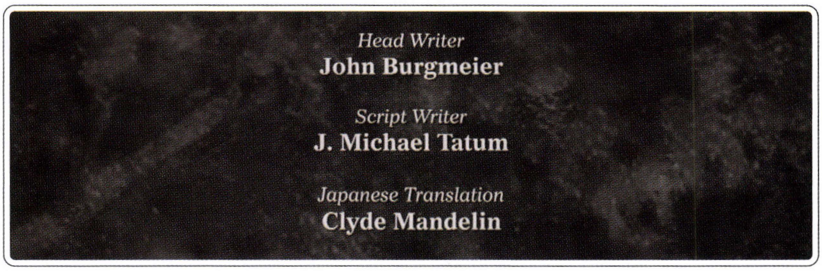
About Me

My name is Clyde Mandelin, but I'm more commonly known online as "Tomato" or just "Mato". I'm a professional Japanese-to-English translator and have been in the industry for about twenty years. I specialize in translating Japanese movies, anime, games, and other entertainment into English.

During my journey to become a professional translator, I studied Japanese-to-English translation in university, in Japan, and on my own as a hobby. As part of my hobby study, I translated old Japanese games that had never been released in English. In short, translation has been a major part of my personal life and professional life for decades.

Several years ago, I started *Legends of Localization*, a website and a book series dedicated to explaining how popular games and movies change during the jump between languages. I've also written books about the history of bad video game translation and what happens when you try to let a computer translate an entire video game on its own.

Basically, I just really like translation and showing how the translation process works. Naturally, this detailed look at *Undertale*'s Japanese translation is another passion project for me.

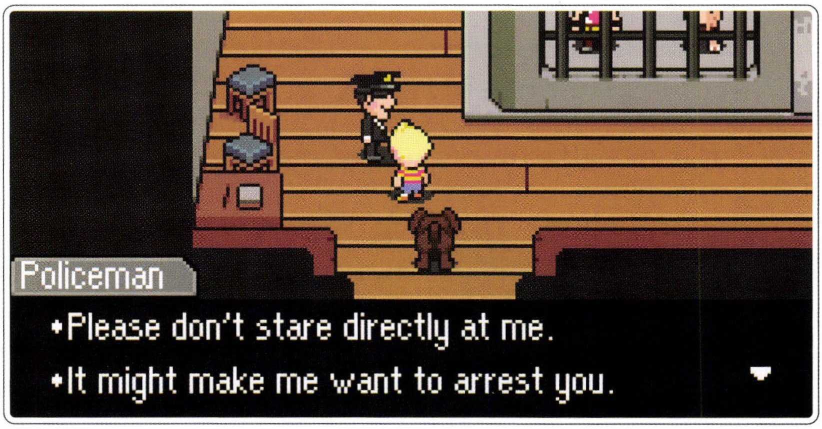


Head Writer
John Burgmeier

Script Writer
J. Michael Tatum

Japanese Translation
Clyde Mandelin

As a professional, I translate and localize all types and genres of Japanese entertainment into English. Each project is fun, unique, and educational!



Policeman

•Please don't stare directly at me.

•It might make me want to arrest you.

And as a hobby, I sometimes create unofficial translations of classic games never released outside of Japan

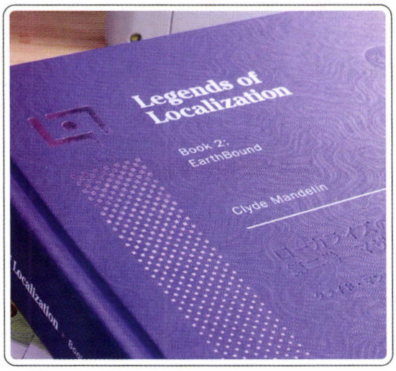
From time to time, I'll share my thoughts and insights about *Undertale,* localization, business experiences, personal experiences, and so on. So keep your eyes out for the little tomato! Well, not literally "out". That would be weird.

A Rare Opportunity

Because I specialize in Japanese-to-English translation, I usually write about how games are translated from Japanese into English. But *Undertale* gives us a chance to look at the opposite side of things: how English games are translated into Japanese.

The older a game gets, the harder it is to document its past. So being right there during *Undertale*'s localization was like watching history happen!

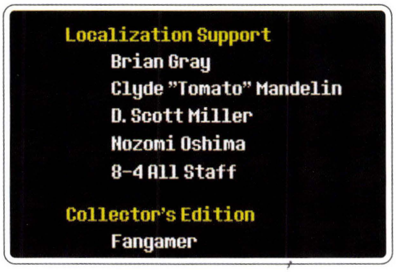
In *Legends of Localization Book 1*, we looked at how the original *Legend of Zelda* was translated into English. There was one key issue, though – the game is so old that nobody remembers who the actual translator was or how the game's translation process worked. As a result, we could see *how* things changed in translation, but there was no way to ask *why*.



My book about *EarthBound* ended up around 420 pages long. This *Undertale* book is a bit shorter, but could've easily been double the size!

In *Legends of Localization Book 2*, we looked at how the classic game *EarthBound* was translated into English. Luckily, through personal connections and friendships, I was able to ask the game's creator and the game's head localizer a handful of questions. Given that *EarthBound* was twenty years old by then, I was thankful to receive *any* kind of inside information at all.

Now, in *Book 3*, we'll see how *Undertale* was translated into Japanese. But this time, I have an unparalleled amount of inside access. I've been friends with the game's creator for years, and I've worked alongside the translation staff in the past. I was even brought on as a consultant during the game's Japanese translation. In other words, I can share firsthand and secondhand knowledge about *Undertale*'s translation process, as well as details about the original game itself that have never seen the light of day.



Localization Support
Brian Gray
Clyde "Tomato" Mandelin
D. Scott Miller
Nozomi Oshima
8-4 All Staff

Collector's Edition
Fangamer

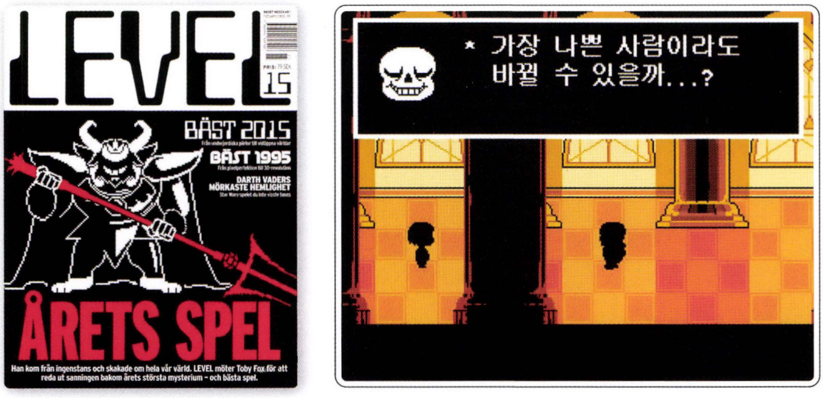
I'm listed in *Undertale*'s credits under "Localization Support", and I did help with stuff, but I'd say my role was pretty minor overall

In short, *Undertale* offers us a rare opportunity to see how English-to-Japanese game translation works, *and* in unprecedented detail. So when the game's creator suggested I write a *Legends of Localization* book about the Japanese version of *Undertale*, I jumped at the chance.

Around the World

As of the writing of this book, *Undertale* has only been officially translated into one language: Japanese. Even so, the game's inherent appeal, together with fan-made translations into other languages, has helped *Undertale* grow from a tiny indie game into a global phenomenon.

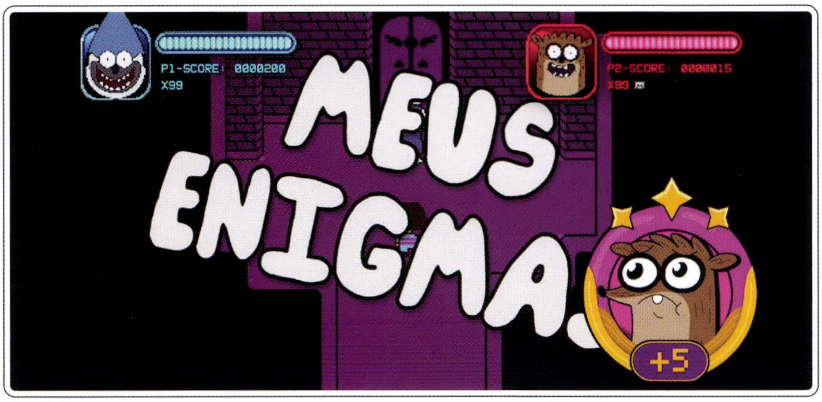
With this in mind, it's important to note that even though we'll be focusing on the English and Japanese versions of *Undertale* in this book, it's only one small view of a much larger picture. *Undertale*'s popularity reaches far beyond these two languages.


LEVEL
15
BÄST 2015
BÄST 1995
DARTH VADERS MÖRKASTE HEMLIGHET
ÅRETS SPEL
Han kom från ingenstans och skakade om hela vår värld. LEVEL möter Toby Fox för att reda ut sanningen bakom årets största mysterium – och bästa spel.

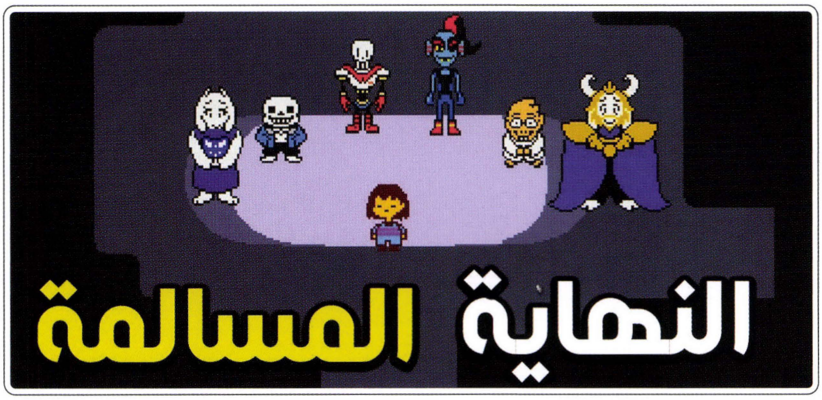
* 가장 나쁜 사람이라도
바뀔 수 있을까...?

LEFT: *Undertale* on the cover of a Swedish video game magazine

RIGHT: *Undertale* is insanely popular in Korea, where fans created and inserted their own translation into the game


P1-SCORE: 0000200
X99
P2-SCORE: 0000015
X99
MEUS ENIGMA...
+5

Cartoon Network Latin America created and aired *Undertale*-themed episodes of *ToonTubers* in Spanish and Portuguese


النهاية المسالمة

Arabic-speaking fans share videos and translation walkthroughs with hundreds of thousands of views each

What is Localization?

What is Localization?

Before we dive into *Undertale*'s English-to-Japanese localization, there's one big question that needs answering: what exactly is localization, anyway?

The word "localization" is actually relatively new in the translation world, so different people use it to mean different things. Here's how I would define it in simple terms, though:

Basically, localization *is* translation. Localization just changes things a bit when a literal translation doesn't quite work.

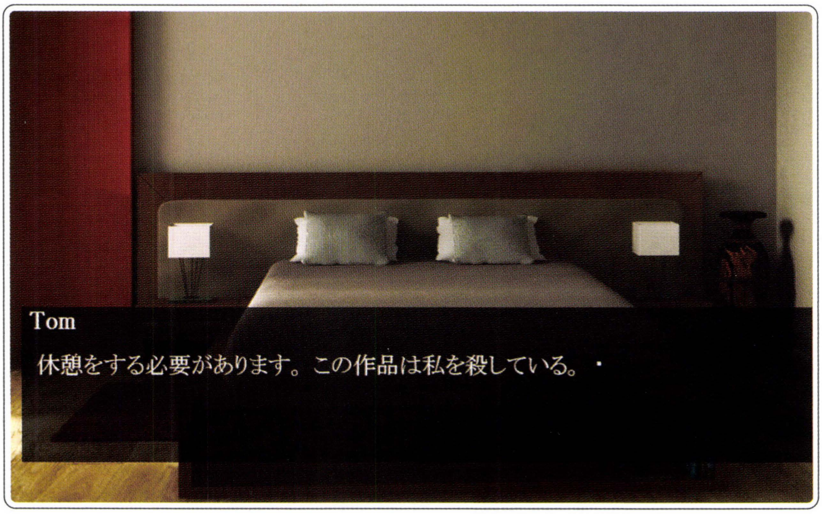
If you're unfamiliar with translation, this idea probably sounds odd at first. Why should anything be changed at all? Shouldn't a literal translation work all the time? Let's find out.

Getting Literal

Imagine you're talking to a grumpy genie who takes everything literally. You want to be rich, so you immediately wish to be "made of money". Unfortunately, instead of becoming rich, you transform into a pile of coins. Oops, that's not what you meant at all!

"Ugh, whatever! I just wish I had lots of dough!" you somehow say. You expect to become rich for sure this time, but instead, you suddenly find yourself covered in bread dough. Oops again!

These examples, as ridiculous as they are, show how a literal interpretation can completely miss the point of what's being said.

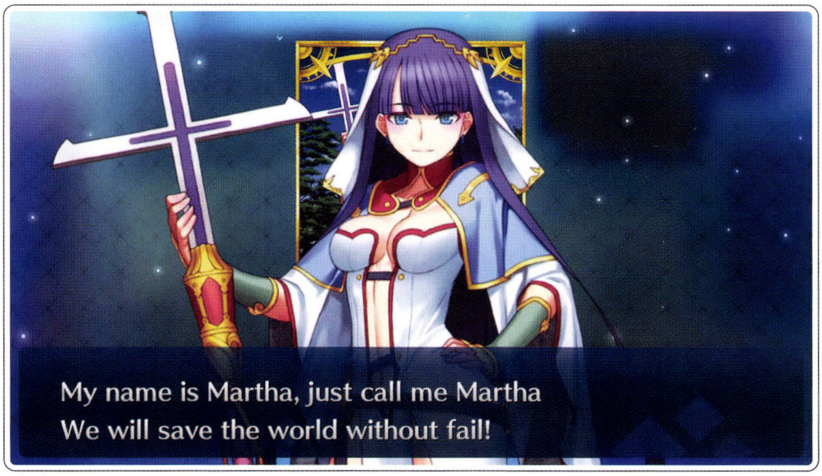


Tom

休憩をする必要があります。この作品は私を殺している。

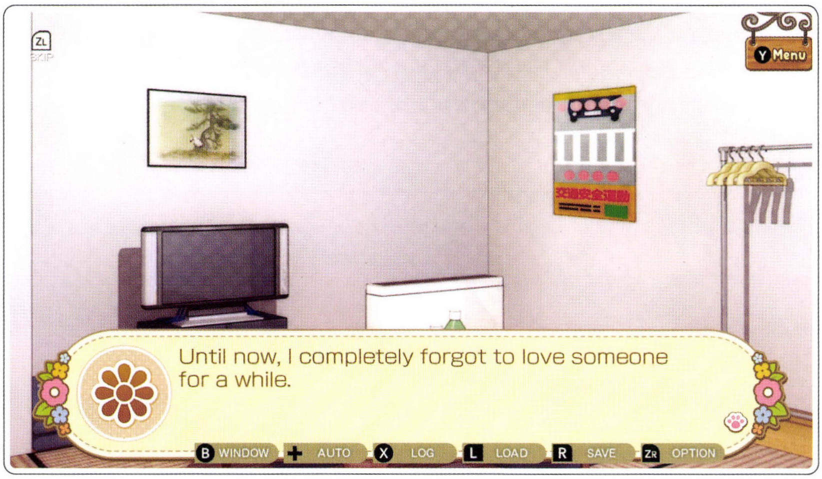
Literal translation can have hilarious side effects. In this scene, the English sentence "this work is killing me" was translated literally into Japanese as "this work of art is murdering me" (Game: *Girls and Quiz*)

When we communicate, words are our tools. They're like paintbrushes that we use to paint pictures for others to see. The problem is that if you focus too hard on someone's tools, you risk missing the full picture of what they're actually saying.



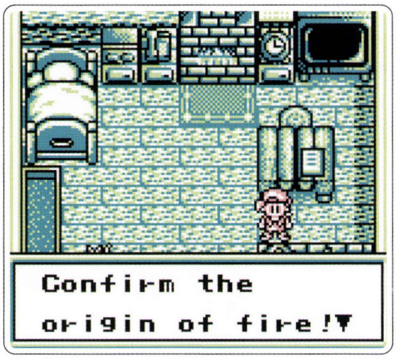
My name is Martha, just call me Martha
We will save the world without fail!

Literal translations can sometimes end up feeling "off" or incomplete (Game: *Fate/Grand Order*)



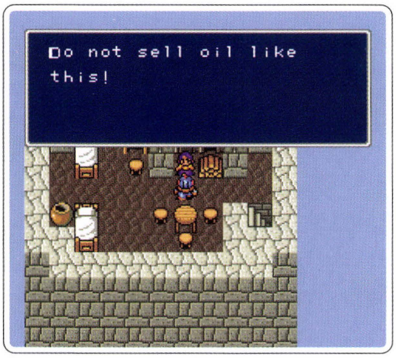
Until now, I completely forgot to love someone for a while.

Literal translations can still sound like a foreign language despite being translated (Game: *Kitty Love*)



Confirm the origin of fire!▼

A literal translation can miss the original, intended meaning, which would have been "Make sure the stove is turned off!" in this example (Game: *Harvest Moon*)



Do not sell oil like this!

Even advanced machine translations tend to miss what's being said by translating too literally. A better translation of this Japanese idiom might've been "Quit loafing around here!" (Game: *Final Fantasy IV* machine translation experiment)

The Need for Localization

Every language has its own unique rules and quirks. Every culture has its own unique values and expectations. Because of this, not every word has a perfect, 1-to-1 equivalent in other languages. So when a straightforward, literal translation isn't possible, one alternative is to use completely different words to say the same thing. And that's precisely what localization is: **preserving the creator's intended meaning but with completely different words.** As the acclaimed translator John Ciardi once put it:

> *When the violin repeats what the piano has just played, it cannot make the same sounds and it can only approximate the same chords. It can, however, make recognizably the same "music," the same air. But it can do so only when it is as faithful to the self-logic of the violin as it is to the self-logic of the piano.*

In short, languages are weird, messy, and complicated. It's easy for people to misunderstand each other in one language, so translating between two can sometimes be impossible. In this chapter, we'll examine a few situations in which straightforward, literal translations don't quite work.

Humor

There's a famous joke in English that goes:

> *Why was 6 afraid of 7? Because 7 8 9!*

Of course, this joke only works because the number "8" and the word "ate" share the same pronunciation in English. This isn't necessarily true in other languages, so a literal translation of the joke might sound like this:

> *Why was the sixth digit afraid of the seventh digit? Because seventh digit eighth digit ninth digit!*

As we can see, the result is meaningless nonsense that loses the original intention entirely. The joke is lost in translation.

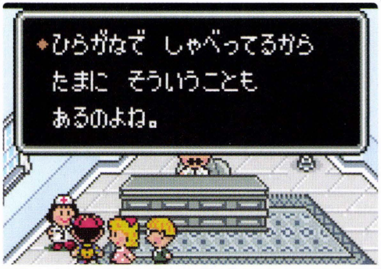
Similarly, consider this Japanese joke:

> *ashi nihon aru kara nihonjin da*

This joke, translated literally, means "I have two legs, so I'm Japanese". Even though it's an incredibly simple, straightforward joke in Japanese, we can see how it makes zero sense when translated into English.

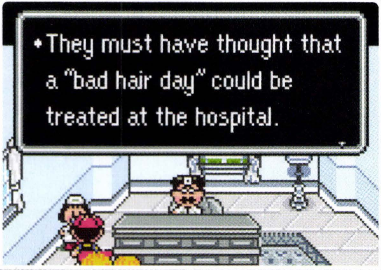
In short, humor rarely translates easily between languages.

So, as a translator, what do you do when you run into an untranslatable joke? The most common solution is to take out the original joke and replace it with a similar joke that works in the target language. And that's precisely what localization is all about: retaining the original intent even if it means changing the original words.



ひらがなで しゃべってるから
たまに そういうことも
あるのよね。

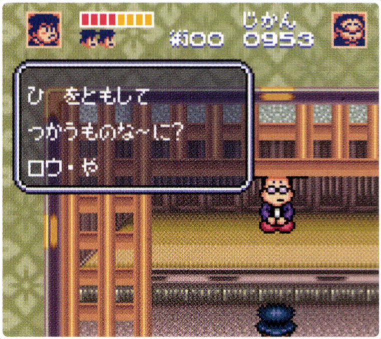
"The other day, someone mistook the word 'hospital' for 'hair salon' and asked for a shampoo and haircut. We speak in hiragana, so I guess that sort of thing is bound to happen sometimes."



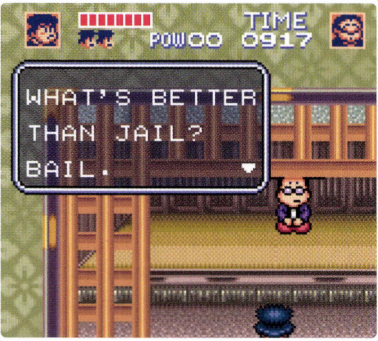
They must have thought that
a "bad hair day" could be
treated at the hospital.

"One person requested a 'shampoo and cut.' They must have thought that a 'bad hair day' could be treated at the hospital. Either that or they wanted their medical insurance to cover their grooming."

The original joke in this scene only makes sense if you understand how the Japanese language works. Because a literal translation wouldn't make sense to most players outside of Japan, the joke was replaced with a different, but similarly-themed joke in English (Game: *EarthBound*)

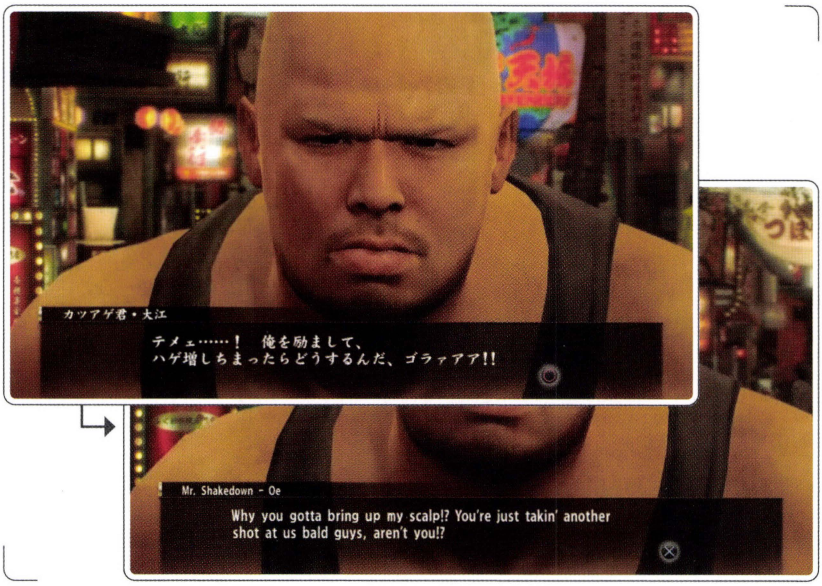


ひ をともして
つかうものな～に?
ロウ・や



WHAT'S BETTER
THAN JAIL?
BAIL.

This imprisoned character plays with the Japanese words for "prison cell" and "candle" to make a simple joke. The translators replaced this untranslatable wordplay with a different prison-themed joke that makes sense in English (Game: *The Legend of the Mystical Ninja*)



カツアゲ君・大江

テメェ……！ 俺を励まして、
ハゲ増しちまったらどうするんだ、ゴラァアア!!

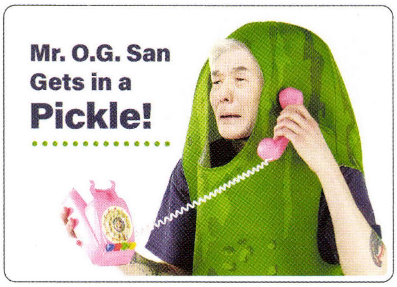
Mr. Shakedown - Oe

Why you gotta bring up my scalp!? You're just takin' another
shot at us bald guys, aren't you!?

This Japanese pun on the words for "go bald" and "encouragement" was replaced with an English pun on the word "scalping" (Game: *Yakuza 0*)

Idioms, Proverbs, and Multi-Layered Phrases

Every language has its own unique set of colorful phrases that have a literal meaning and a functional meaning. For example, the English phrase "I'm in a pickle" literally means "I am inside of a pickle" but functionally means "I'm in a difficult situation".



Imagine this title being translated literally – it'd still be kind of silly to see this weird guy in a pickle suit, but the reason for the suit would be lost

These problematic, multi-layered phrases come in all types. Idioms, for example, are notorious for having very different literal and functional meanings:

- **Japanese idiom:** *nodo kara te ga deru*
  Literal meaning: to have your hand coming out of your mouth
  Functional meaning: to want something very much

- **Finnish idiom:** *heittää lusikka nurkkaan*
  Literal meaning: to throw the spoon in the corner
  Functional meaning: to die

Proverbs are another source of tricky phrases with multiple meanings:

- **German proverb:** *Morgenstund hat Gold im Mund*
  Literal meaning: the morning hour has gold in the mouth
  Functional meaning: early risers get the best opportunities

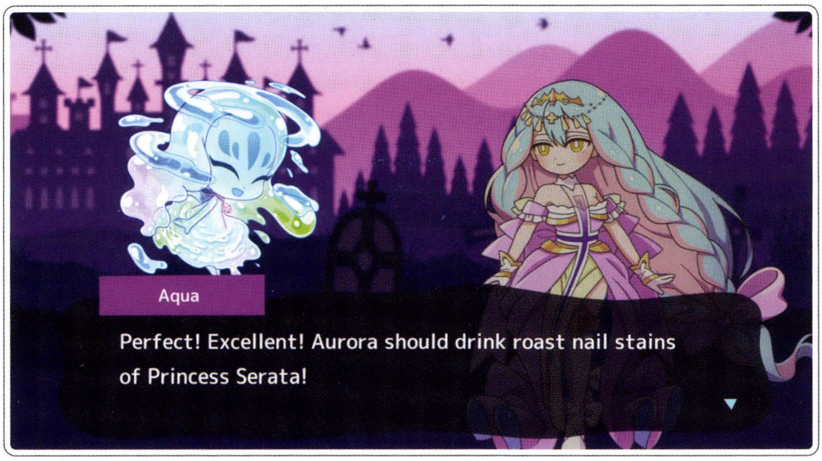
- **Japanese proverb:** *hiza to mo dangō*
  Literal meaning: consult even your knees
  Functional meaning: consulting others can be unexpectedly useful

Slang, jargon, and other multi-layered phrases provide a similar challenge for translators:

- **Japanese slang:** *denpa*
  Literal meaning: electromagnetic wave
  Functional meaning: a person with a wildly incoherent and delusional mindset

- **Choctaw phrase:** *oka mali hashi akuchaka itintakla*
  Literal meaning: head towards water wind while heading towards the sun's home
  Functional meaning: southeast

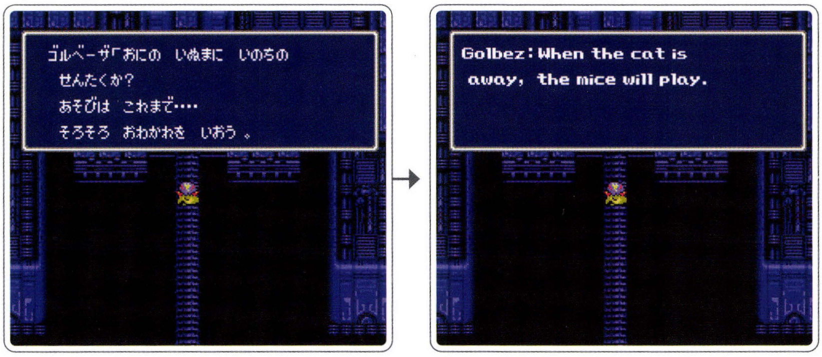
As we can see, idioms, proverbs, and other multi-layered phrases are rarely meant to be taken literally, so it doesn't always make sense to translate them literally. Instead, it's usually more helpful to focus on preserving their functional meanings, even if it means ignoring their literal wordings.



Aqua

Perfect! Excellent! Aurora should drink roast nail stains of Princess Serata!

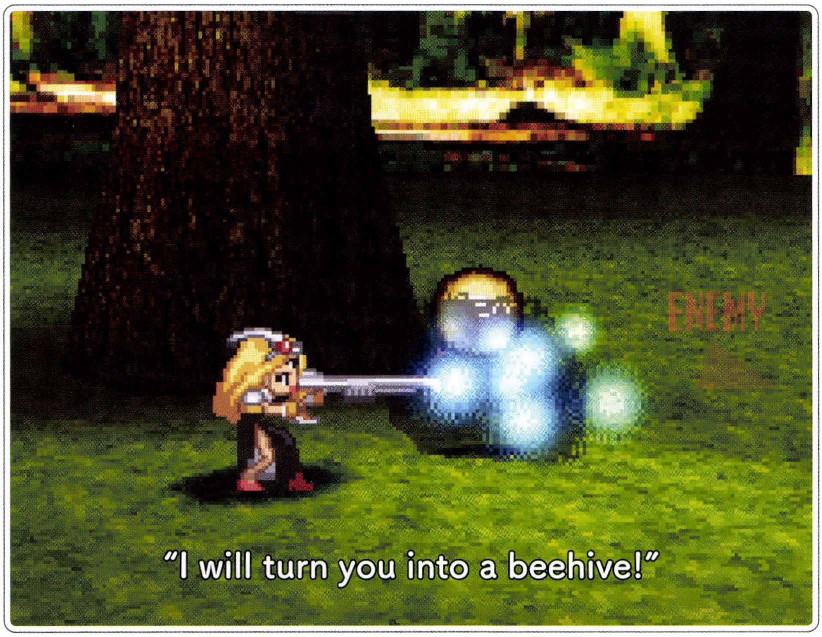
The Japanese phrase "to drink the brewed dirt from under XX's fingernails" sounds bizarre when translated literally, but functionally means "to take a lesson from XX" (Game: *Refreshing Sideways Puzzle*)



ゴルベーザ「おにの いぬまに いのちの
せんたくか？
あそびは これまで…・
そろそろ おわかれを いおう 。

Golbez: When the cat is away, the mice will play.

This Japanese proverb could be literally translated as "doing life laundry while the ogre is away". This doesn't make much sense in English though, so the localized script uses a completely different proverb to say roughly the same thing (Game: *Final Fantasy IV*)



"I will turn you into a beehive!"

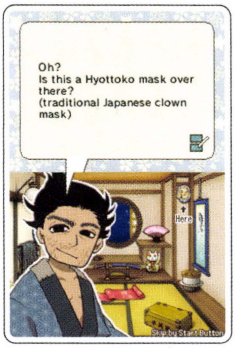
This Japanese battle cry was translated literally into English as "I will turn you into a beehive", resulting in a bizarre, hilarious, non-threatening threat. In English, we'd probably say something like "I'll fill you full of holes!" or "I'll turn you into Swiss cheese!" instead (Game: *Star Ocean: The Second Story*)

Cultural Knowledge and Expectations

Have you ever heard someone tell an inside joke that you weren't in on? Even though you understood the literal words that were being said, the intended meaning was lost on you. This same thing happens in translation.

Cultures are basically their own giant in-groups: they have their own histories, customs, rituals, traditions, folk stories, foods, and more. A reference to any of these might sound meaningless to an outsider when translated literally. In this situation, understanding the literal words isn't enough – the actual "inside joke" needs to be explained too. It basically needs to be translated twice instead of only once.

This type of in-group obstacle comes in many forms. Here are a few common examples.



Oh?
Is this a Hyottoko mask over there?
(traditional Japanese clown mask)

In rare cases, translators will simply leave cultural references untranslated and leave an explanation in parentheses immediately afterward (Game: *Mysterious Stars: The Samurai*)

Cultural and Historical References

Imagine someone says in Japanese:

> *pussuma de nagisuke o osotta egashira 2:50 mitai da!*
> (Literally: It's just like when Egashira 2:50 attacked Nagisuke on Pussuma!)

The above translation, despite being literal, is probably still meaningless to most people outside of Japan. It only makes sense as intended if you're already familiar with Japanese celebrities and television. You have to be part of the "in-group", in other words.

Cultural Facts, Stats, and Practices

Imagine someone says in Japanese:

> *watashi no nenshū wa 530,000 en desu*
> (Literally: My annual income is 530,000 yen.)

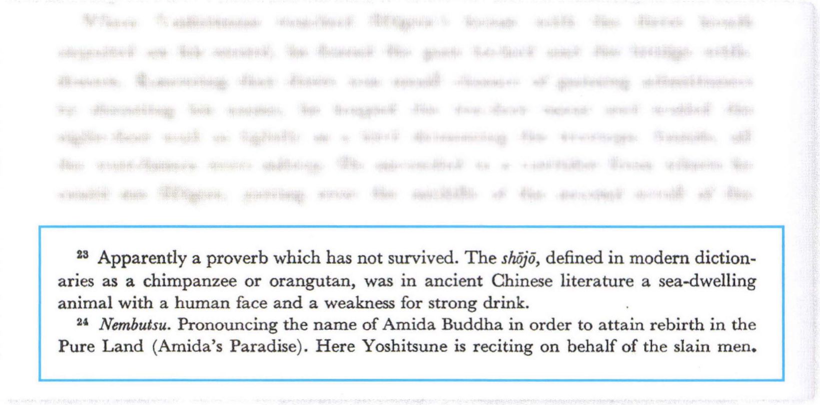
At first glance, this literal translation seems fine. But for people unfamiliar with Japanese economics, it's unclear just how much money this is. Is it a lot? Is it very little? A literal translation still leaves questions for those outside the in-group.

Culture-Specific Food

References to culture-specific foods can become meaningless when translated literally or left untranslated. Imagine someone says in Japanese:

> *kinō shirako to funazushi o tabeta*
> (Literally: I ate shirako and funazushi yesterday.)

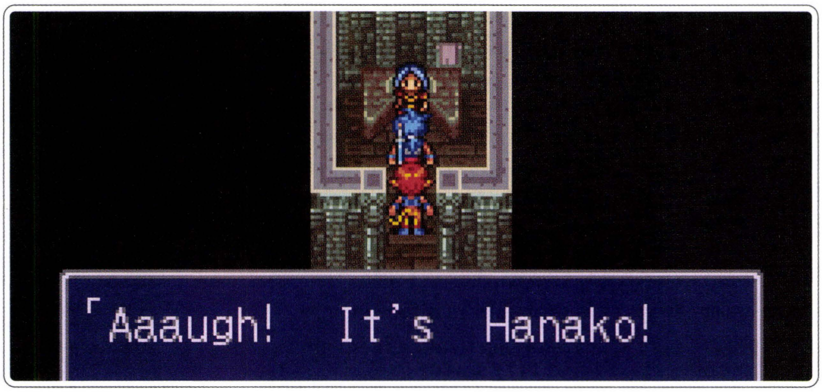
For people not familiar with Japanese food, this translation probably doesn't mean much at all. As we can see, a literal translation can only go so far when crossing the cultural divide.



[23] Apparently a proverb which has not survived. The *shōjō*, defined in modern dictionaries as a chimpanzee or orangutan, was in ancient Chinese literature a sea-dwelling animal with a human face and a weakness for strong drink.

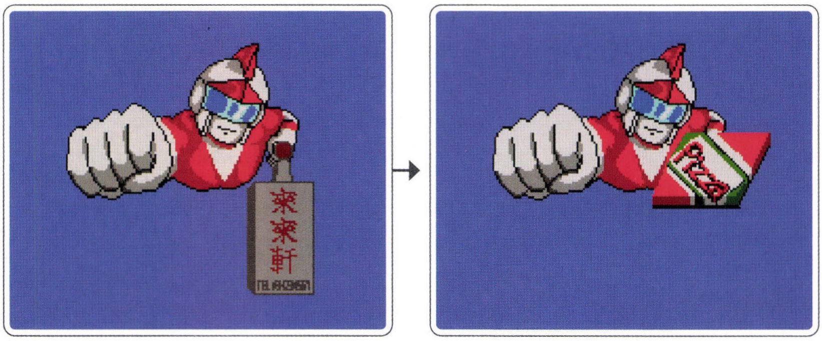
[24] *Nembutsu.* Pronouncing the name of Amida Buddha in order to attain rebirth in the Pure Land (Amida's Paradise). Here Yoshitsune is reciting on behalf of the slain men.

There are several ways of handling cultural matters in translation. In academia, it's standard practice to translate everything literally and include lots of explanatory footnotes. In entertainment, it's more common to localize foreign cultural references by replacing them with something similar, but more familiar to the target audience

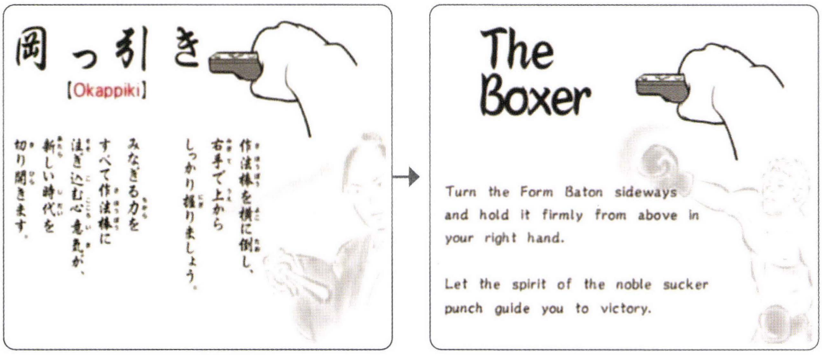


「Aaaugh! It's Hanako!

A Japanese line about "Hanako" was translated literally into English, making it completely meaningless for most players outside of Japan. For players in Japan, it's an obvious reference to the famous urban legend of Hanako, the ghost girl who haunts bathrooms (Game: *Breath of Fire II*)



Originally, this character delivered food from a generically named Japanese-style Chinese restaurant. Because the name's significance would've been lost on players outside of Japan, the package was replaced with a generic pizza box for the English release (Game: *Tricky Kick*)



岡っ引き
【Okappiki】

作法棒を横に倒し、
右手で上から
しっかり握りましょう。

みなぎる力を
すべて作法棒に
注ぎ込む心意気が、
新しい時代を
切り開きます。

The Boxer

Turn the Form Baton sideways and hold it firmly from above in your right hand.

Let the spirit of the noble sucker punch guide you to victory.

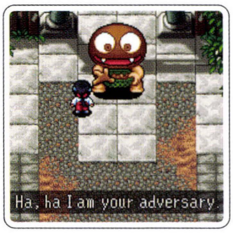
Japanese players are asked to hold the controller like a traditional *okappiki*. But because most players outside of Japan wouldn't understand this reference, the English version asks players to hold the controller like a boxer instead (Game: *WarioWare: Smooth Moves*)

Speech Patterns

Naturally, a translator should strive to preserve what's being said. But it's often just as important to preserve *how* it's being said. Otherwise the resulting translation might become "flattened". A flattened translation lacks the original text's unique traits, can lead to confusion, and can cause key information to be lost.

Language-specific speech patterns are particularly tricky – and sometimes impossible – to preserve when jumping between languages. Here are a few speech patterns that can easily be lost in a literal translation.

Accents and Dialects



Originally, this boss in *Pocky and Rocky* spoke with a heavy Japanese regional accent. This trait was left unlocalized in English, resulting in flattened dialogue

Some speech patterns have their own histories, backgrounds, and deep ties to specific regions of specific countries. These speech patterns convey extra information that give off a specific vibe not found anywhere else.

For example, there is no "Boston accent" in Japanese. There's no cowboy dialect, nor is there a "Southern belle" speech pattern. Similarly, there's no "Heian era" speech pattern or "Kyoto accent" in English. These speech patterns simply become flattened in a literal translation.

Pronouns

Different languages use pronouns in different ways. For example, in English we only have "I/me" when referring to ourselves, but there are dozens of ways to say "I" in Japanese, each with a different connotation.

Similarly, there are dozens of Japanese pronouns that mean "you" in the singular, but it's just as common to restate the listener's name every time instead of using a pronoun. In fact, it's perfectly normal to drop pronouns entirely in Japanese if it's clear who's being referred to. The Japanese phrase for "I love you", *ai shiteiru*, literally contains no pronouns, for instance.

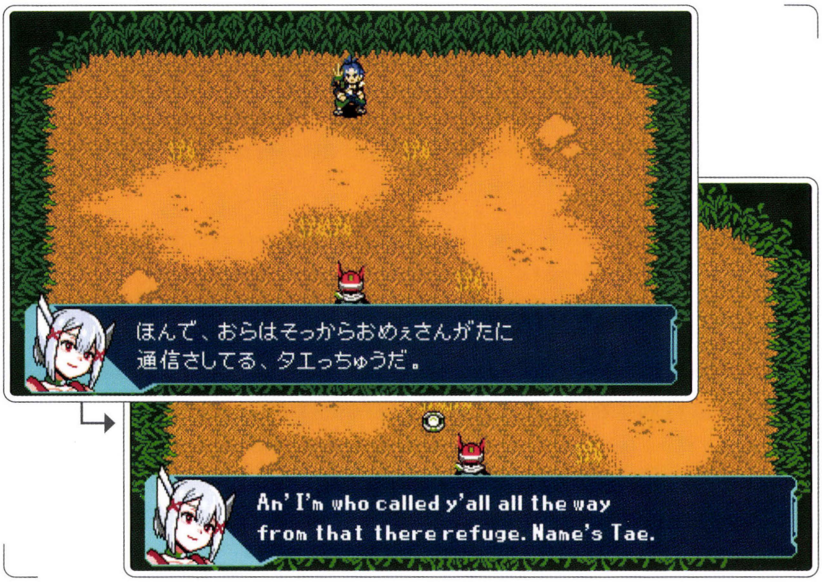
In some Japanese translations of the *Harry Potter* series, Voldemort uses the first-person pronoun *ore-sama*, the same pronoun that Wario uses

Because every language uses pronouns in such different ways, dialogue and conversations risk being flattened when translated literally.

Grammar

The same sentence can flow very differently in different languages. For example, English sentences generally go subject-verb-object, as in "Bob ate a monkey". But in Japanese, sentences tend to go subject-object-verb, as in "Bob a monkey ate". This difference can make a literal translation fall apart when a sentence is incomplete – which is extremely common in Japanese – or when timing is important.

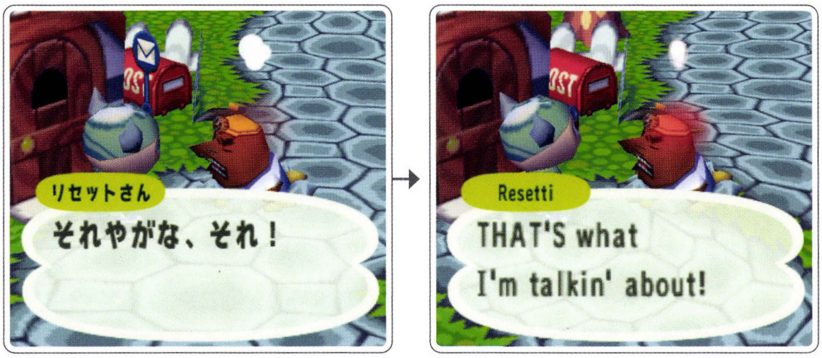
Other aspects of grammar, such as gendered speech and politeness levels, also get flattened in a literal translation. Basically, grammar is a language's rulebook, but not every language plays by the same rules.



ほんで、おらはそっからおめぇさんがたに
通信さしてる、タエっちゅうだ。

An' I'm who called y'all all the way
from that there refuge. Name's Tae.

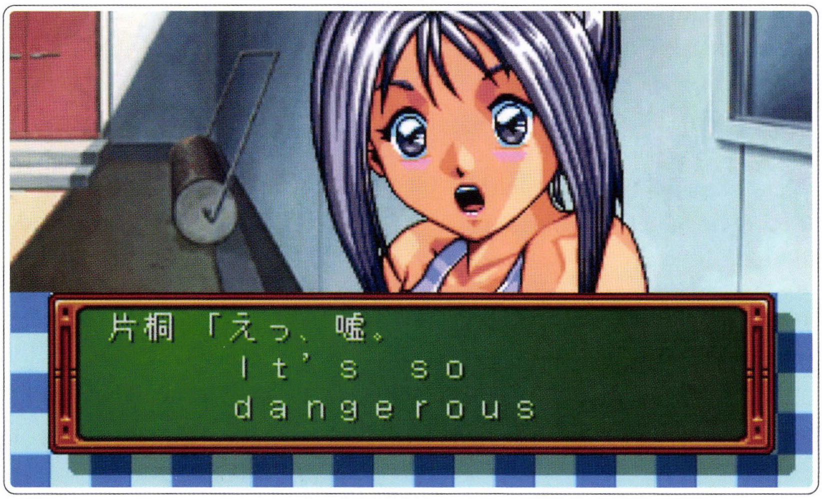
This Japanese line features a strong "rural, country bumpkin" speech pattern. The localized line, despite being in a completely different language, uses a roughly similar English dialect to provide the same vibe and details that would've otherwise been lost in a literal translation (Game: *Blaster Master Zero 2*)



リセットさん
それやがな、それ！

Resetti
THAT'S what
I'm talkin' about!

In the Japanese *Animal Crossing* games, Mr. Resetti speaks with a very thick Osaka dialect. Because this dialect doesn't exist in English, the localization team approximated it by giving him a distinctive, gruff New York accent instead



片桐「えっ、嘘。
It's so
dangerous

Imagine someone asked you to translate this game into English. What happens when you run into text like this?

If a bilingual character sometimes speaks a foreign language, a literal translation of their dialogue into that foreign language will flatten their speech and effectively turn the character monolingual (Game: *Tokimeki Memorial*)

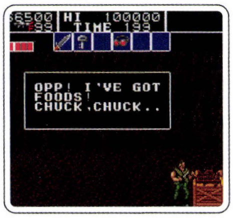
Language Peculiarities

Despite their differences, DVDs, Blu-rays, and VHS tapes can all hold the same movie. These formats aren't compatible with each other, though – you can't just stick a VHS tape into a DVD player. Languages are very similar – they can say roughly the same things, but you can't just shove text from one language into another and hope it'll work right.

Here are some examples of how a language's uniqueness can cause literal translations to miss the mark.

Sound Effects

Some sound-effect words, such as animal sounds, are generally easy to convert between languages. But some languages use sound-effect words more than others, and some languages have sound-effect words that don't even exist in other languages. For example, the Japanese language has a sound for staring. It even has a sound effect for silence. When it comes to sound effects, sometimes a literal translation isn't even possible.



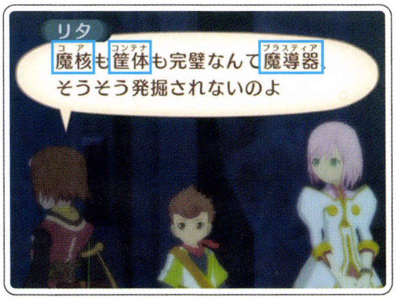
Sound effect translation can lead to humorous results if done poorly. Here, the Japanese sound effect for chewing food hilariously became "CHUCK, CHUCK" in English (Game: *Battle Rangers*)

Punctuation

Not every language uses punctuation the same way. Some languages have similar-looking punctuation marks that serve different purposes. And some languages have punctuation marks that don't exist in other languages. Because of this, a literal translation with all of the original punctuation intact can have unintended effects.

Writing Systems

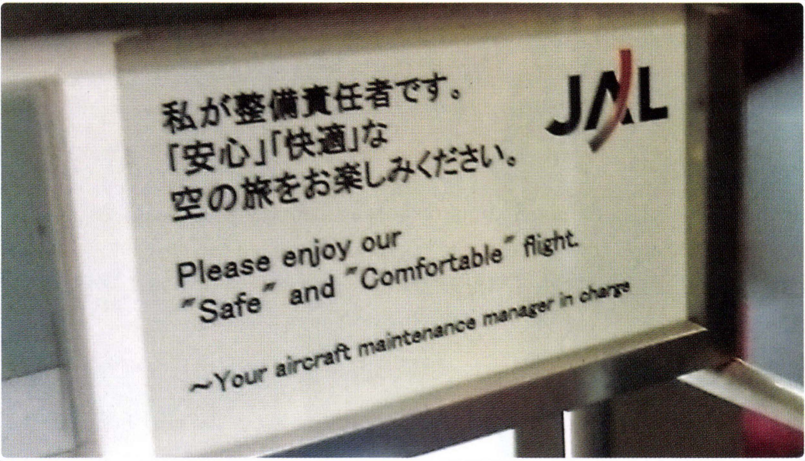
Unlike English, the Japanese language has three distinct writing systems. This lets you spell the same word in multiple ways – sometimes dozens of ways – to achieve different effects. What's more, the Japanese language even allows you to write words on top of other words to achieve various effects not possible in other languages. Unsurprisingly, these effects tend to get flattened in a literal translation.



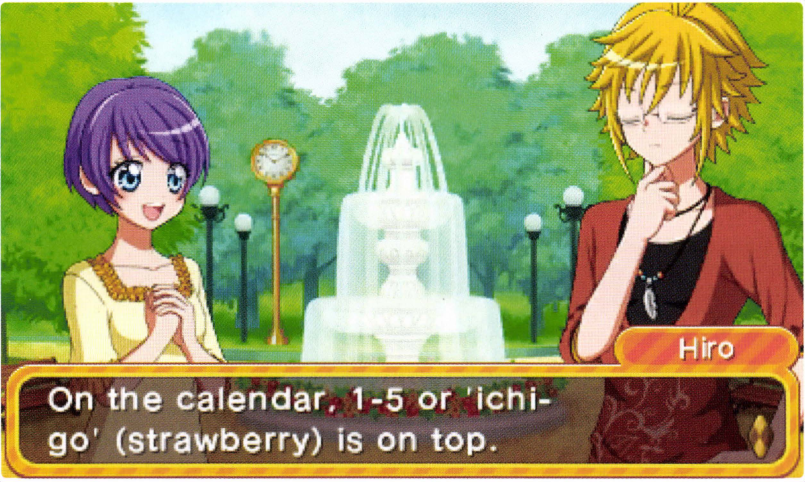
Japanese text can have extra text on top to change meanings or pronunciations (Game: *Tales of Vesperia*)

Numbers

If you type "58008" on a calculator and turn it upside down, it makes English-speaking schoolchildren laugh because it spells "BOOBS". This numberplay would make little sense to non-English speakers, however. Similarly, the Japanese language has its own unique forms of numberplay that make zero sense in other languages – November 4th can be interpreted as "Nice Butt Day", for example. When language is involved, numbers lose their literal predictability.

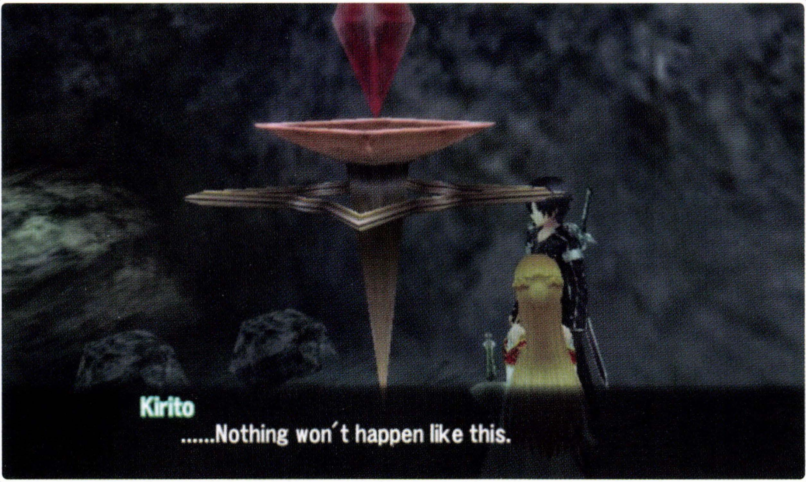

私が整備責任者です。
「安心」「快適」な
空の旅をお楽しみください。
JAL
Please enjoy our
"Safe" and "Comfortable" flight.
~Your aircraft maintenance manager in charge

In Japanese, quotation marks and similar characters are often used for emphasis. In English, however, such quotation marks often indicate sarcasm and/or dishonesty


Hiro

On the calendar, 1-5 or 'ichi-go' (strawberry) is on top.

This bit of Japanese numberplay was left unlocalized for English-speaking players. Instead, a short translation note was added for clarification for those unfamiliar with Japanese (Game: *Waku Waku Sweets*)


Kirito

......Nothing won't happen like this.

Double-negatives are usually a no-no in proper English, but this same rule doesn't necessarily apply to other languages like Japanese. As a result, literal translations can end up breaking expected grammar rules (Game: *Sword Art Online: Hollow Fragment*)

Creative Packaging

Sometimes, it's not the words themselves that are difficult to translate, but how they're presented. Literal translations tend to fall apart when this type of "creative packaging" is involved. Here are a few simple examples.

Clues and Hints

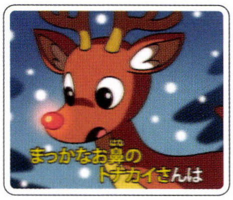
Writers sometimes include meticulously worded hints meant to guide the reader or lead the reader astray. Such hints might be used as mystery clues, as foreshadowing devices, or to say something indirectly. Naturally, a carefully crafted hint can easily break during translation.

Poetry

Rhyme, rhythm, and syllable counts are important in poetry, but tend to get lost in a literal translation. For example, a literal translation of a Japanese haiku into English will probably have too many syllables to still be a traditional haiku.

Songs

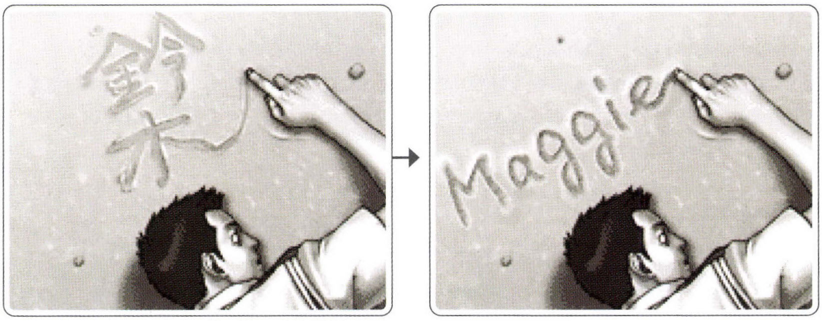
Songs present a similar creative packaging problem. A literal translation of "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" into Japanese, for example, will result in lyrics that no longer fit the music. The natural solution, then, is to tweak the translation until they *do* fit the music:


まっかなお鼻の
トナカイさんは

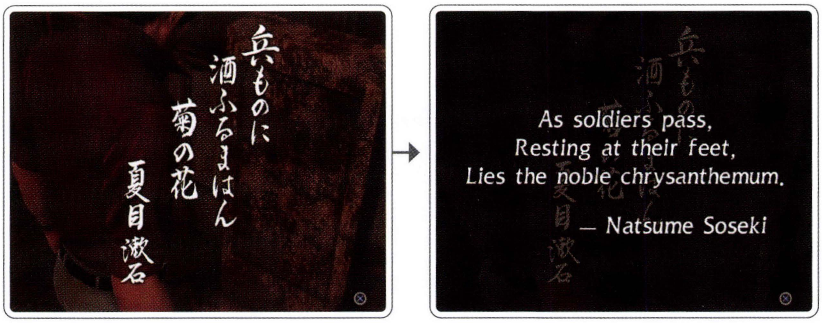
Incidentally, this particular localization from 1960 is the standard version everyone in Japan sings today, but many other localizations exist. One even somehow inserts Jesus into the lyrics!

English Lyrics	Localized Japanese Lyrics
Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer had a very shiny nose	*makka na ohana no tonakai san wa* (The reindeer with a bright red nose)
And if you ever saw it you would even say it glows	*itsumo minna no waraimono* (was always laughed at by everyone)
All of the other reindeer used to laugh and call him names	*demo sono toshi no kurisumasu no hi* (But on Christmas Day that year)
They never let poor Rudolph play in any reindeer games	*santa no ojisan wa iimashita* (old man Santa said)
Then one foggy Christmas Eve Santa came to say	*kurai yomichi wa pika pika no* (On the dark night path)
Rudolph with your nose so bright won't you guide my sleigh tonight?	*omae no hana ga yaku ni tatsu no sa* (your shiny nose will be useful)
Then how the reindeer loved him as they shouted out with glee	*itsumo naiteta tonakai san wa* (The reindeer who always used to cry)
"Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer You'll go down in history!"	*koyoi koso wa to yorokobimashita* (gleefully felt "tonight's finally my night!")

Although these Japanese lyrics don't fully match the English lyrics, they still tell roughly the same story with words that can be sung to the original tune.



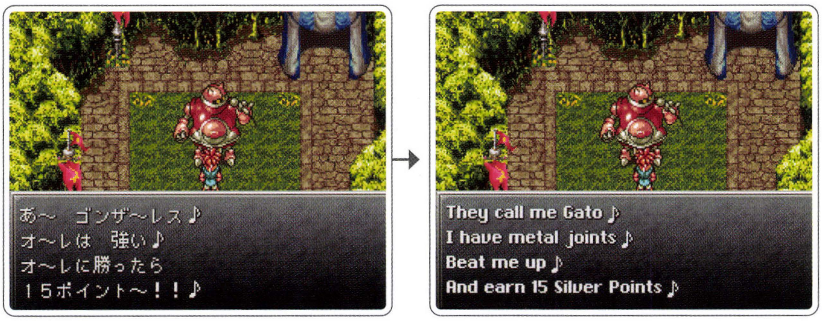
This dying message was localized for audiences unfamiliar with Japanese writing systems. Without this change, the underlying mystery – and its solution – would've made zero sense in English (Game: *Phoenix Wright – Ace Attorney: Justice For All*)



兵ものに
酒ふるまはん
菊の花
夏目漱石

As soldiers pass,
Resting at their feet,
Lies the noble chrysanthemum.
— Natsume Soseki

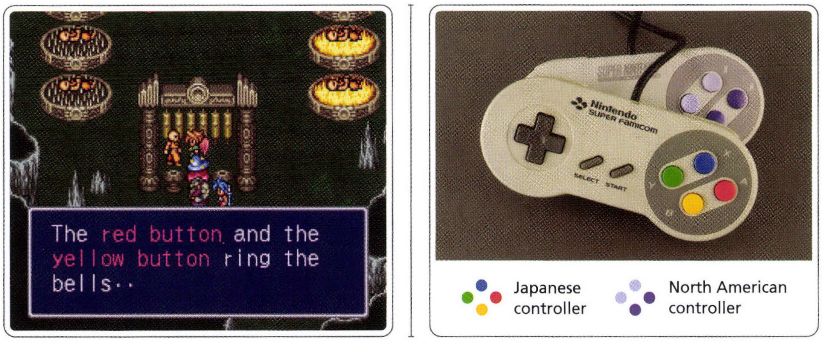
This 5-7-5 Japanese haiku also contains an important gameplay clue. As such, the content of the poem was prioritized over the need to keep the syllable count intact (Game: *Yakuza 6*)



あ～　ゴンザ～レス♪
オ～レは　強い♪
オ～レに勝ったら
１５ポイント～！！♪

They call me Gato ♪
I have metal joints ♪
Beat me up ♪
And earn 15 Silver Points ♪

Gato's Japanese song, which was meant to be sung to his theme music, required some minor lyrical rewrites to remain singable in the English release (Game: *Chrono Trigger*)



The red button and the yellow button ring the bells..

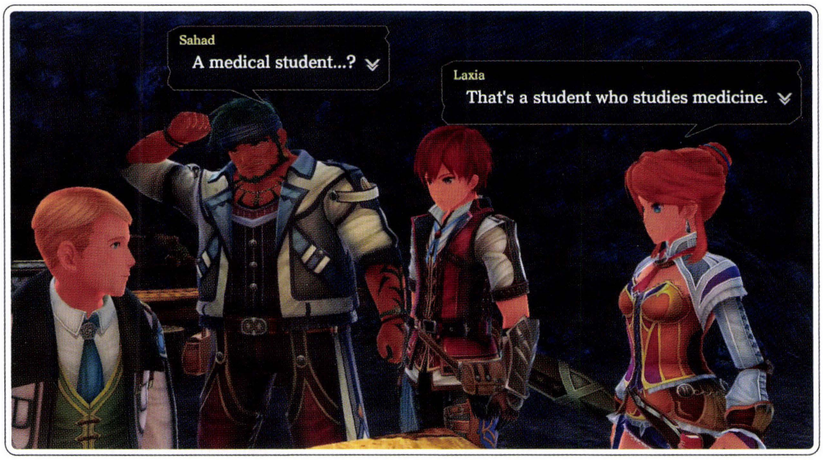
This gameplay hint refers to the differently colored buttons on the player's controller. Although the hint was translated literally into English, regional controller differences ensured the hint was meaningless for most players in North America (Game: *Breath of Fire II*)

Avoiding Side Effects

Sometimes, literal translations simply come across as odd or confusing. Occasionally, they might even carry extra, unintended meanings in the target language. If left as-is, these translations risk conveying something the original creator never intended.

Redundancy

Sometimes a literal translation might sound unintentionally redundant or foolish. This is common in entertainment translation when special terminology is being defined, and said terminology uses words from a foreign language. Redundancy can also occur when a word sounds complicated in the original language but simple in the target language.



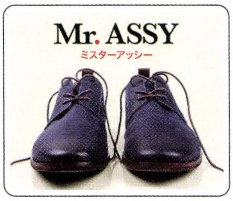
Sahad
A medical student...?

Laxia
That's a student who studies medicine.

A literal translation can cause dialogue to mesh improperly, leading to redundancies and unintentionally silly sentences (Game: *Ys VIII: Lacrimosa of Dana*)

Sounding Funny or Improper

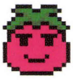
A literal translation can leave an unintended impression if it sounds funny or inappropriate in the target language. For example, there's an item in the *Pokémon* series that restores Power Points. In Japanese, the item is literally called the "PP Aid". This name would sound unintentionally funny and inappropriate in English, however, so the item was renamed to something tamer during localization.



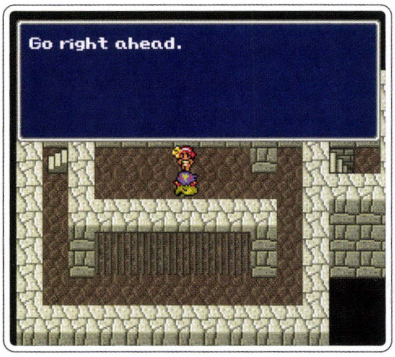
Words and names that sound fine in one language won't necessarily sound fine in another language

Ambiguity

A literal translation of an idea that's clearly defined in the source language can become ambiguous in the target language. For example, the Japanese term *hikari damēji* literally means "light damage" in English. But wait, does that mean "damage that isn't severe" or does it mean "damage from light beams"? In Japanese, it's clearly the latter, but the literal English translation paves the way for confusion.

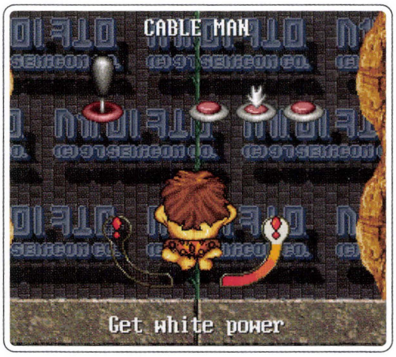


Japan doesn't embrace fair use doctrine, so please enjoy the many off-model illustrations that this book has to offer!



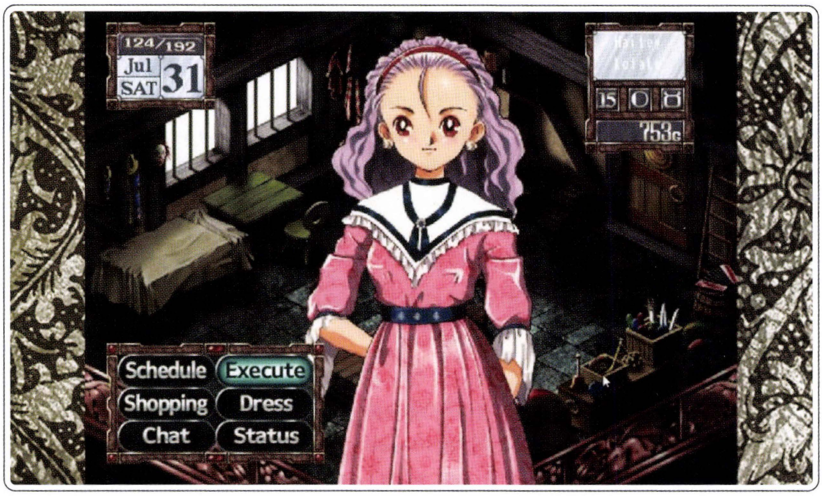
Go right ahead.

A literal translation can create ambiguity where there was none before. For example, is this character giving an invitation, or is she giving directions? (Game: *Final Fantasy II*, *Super NES*)

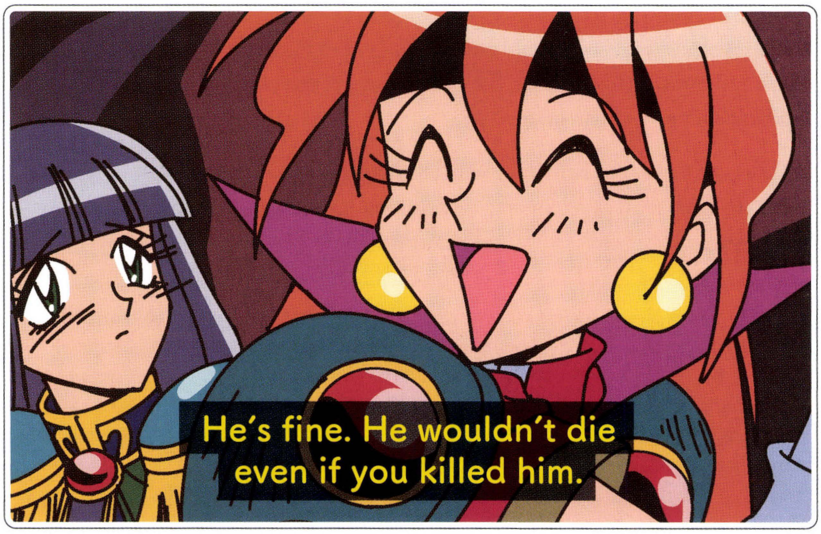


Get white power

Even the simplest of words can take on extra, unintended meanings when translated literally between languages (Game: *B.C. Story*)



The word "Execute" in this menu is a literal translation of the Japanese word, but it also takes on the extra, unintended meaning of "murder my character for her wrongdoing" in addition to "perform task" (Game: *Princess Maker 3*)



He's fine. He wouldn't die even if you killed him.

Literal translations can sometimes come across as distractingly funny or weird. This *Slayers* line, for example, is literally what's said in Japanese, but "even if you tried to kill him, he wouldn't stay dead" is functionally closer to the intended meaning

External Influences

Being a professional translator is a lot like being a professional chef – a customer hires you to create something that needs to follow custom specifications.

For example, a restaurant customer can order a hamburger, but ask that it be cooked a certain way and include specific toppings. Similarly, a translation client can order something to be translated according to their custom requirements, like "each line of text can only be 22 letters long" or "use these specific terms in these situations".

What's more, customers are also free to modify the final product as they see fit. If a restaurant customer wants to set their hamburger on fire or turn it into a horrifying birthday cake, they can do that. Likewise, a translation client can edit the final product however they want. Basically, clients have direct influence over how a translation is performed and how it's ultimately presented.

HAPPY TRANSLATION

"The translated script MUST be half the length of the original text, oh, and after you're done we'll insert some memes!"

When it comes to entertainment translation, clients are one part of the equation, but there are other parts too. The original creator, for example, might demand that certain names be spelled certain ways, or that certain terms be translated in certain ways. Industry and corporate guidelines might also demand that certain things be handled in certain ways. And, of course, local laws and cultural values can have an effect on the final product.

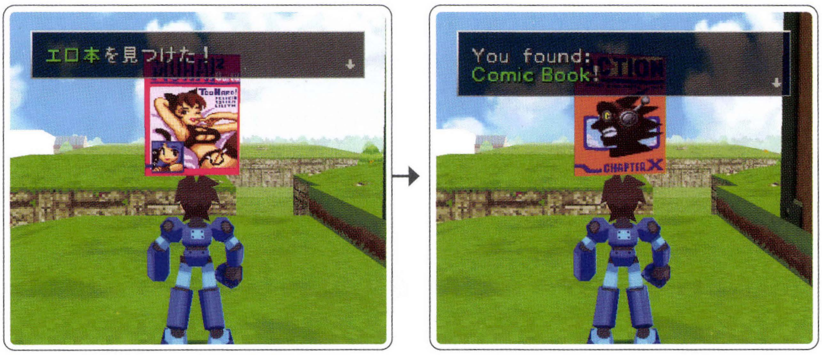
Video game localizations, in particular, have undergone such content changes for decades. These changes have famously included:

- Removal of religious content
- Removal of sexual content
- Removal of drug, alcohol, and tobacco use
- Removal of racial and sexual stereotypes
- Removal of profanity and excessive violence
- Removal of blood, gore, and graphic illustrations of death

These changes were especially common in video game localizations during the 1990s and 2000s. However, as the times change, the external influences on the localization process can change too.

In short, professional entertainment localization rarely happens in a vacuum – there are almost always external factors that might cause something to deviate from a straightforward, literal translation.

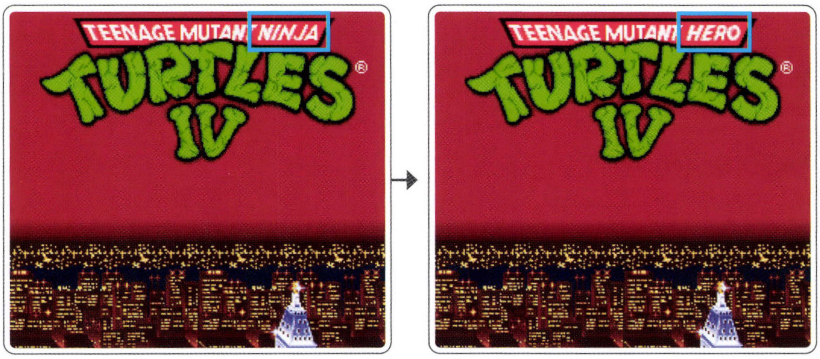
It's common to see jokes, references, and text changes added to translated games. When such added content is unwarranted, it technically ceases to be a translation or a localization. Because the result no longer reflects the original's intention, it becomes more of a "transformation" or "alteration". I'm not fond of this practice myself, and as a professional translator I don't feel comfortable tinkering with others' creativity.



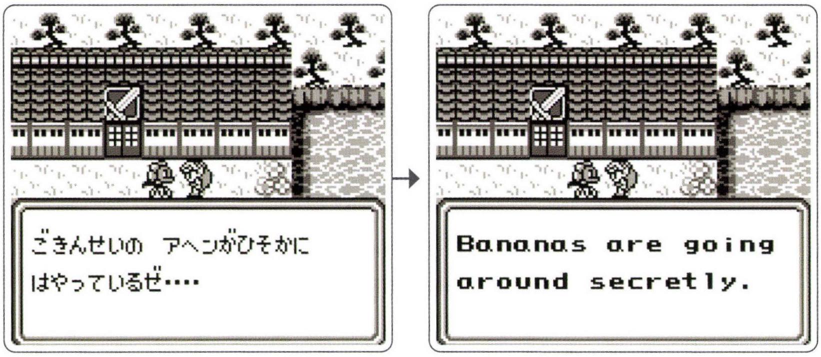
エロ本を見つけた！

You found:
Comic Book!

At some point during the localization process, this "Naughty Book" item was replaced with a tamer "Comic Book" item as a result of external influences (Game: *Mega Man Legends*)



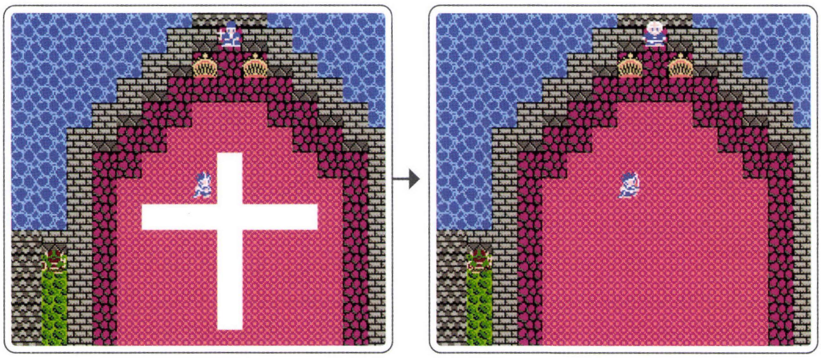
In the 1980s and 1990s, the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* games were renamed for certain audiences due to local laws forbidding references to ninjas



ごきんせいの　アヘンがひそかに
はやっているぜ‥‥

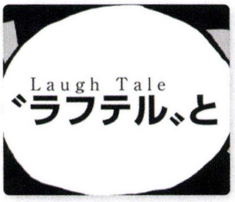
Bananas are going
around secretly.

External factors caused all references to opium to be replaced with bananas for the English-language release (Game: *Final Fantasy Legend II*)



Because video games rely on more than text to convey ideas, localization and external influences can apply to graphical depictions too. Here, we see how religious imagery was dropped from the English release of *Dragon Warrior III* due to Nintendo of America's content policies at the time

Unpredictable Circumstances

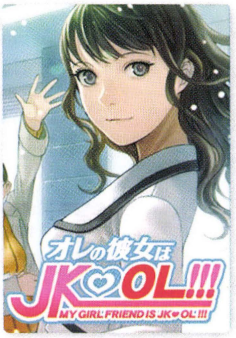


Basically, you can translate something literally to the best of your ability and still be wrong – unless you can read minds or see the future

Sometimes, the lack of external information can cause a literal translation to fail later on. This is common when translating ongoing entertainment series. In these situations, it's possible that only the original creator knows where the story will go. Or it's possible that the creator has no idea and is making things up as they go. Either way, without input from the creator, a translator can only hope and guess which insignificant things will become significant later on.

As an example, an important island in the *One Piece* series named ラフテル *(rafuteru)* was introduced in 1999. Because the Japanese language doesn't distinguish between "L" and "R" sounds, and because the series' creator wasn't involved in the translation process, English translators originally called the island "Raftel", hoping this literal transcription was correct. In 2019, with the series still chugging along, it was finally revealed that the creator intended the name to be "Laugh Tale" all along.

And Many More


オレの彼女は
JK♥OL!!!
MY GIRLFRIEND IS JK♥OL!!!

Local abbreviations can completely lose their intended meaning if left intact and unlocalized

There are many other times when a literal translation might not work properly. Some of these problematic situations involve:

- Abbreviations, signs, and symbols
- Units of measurement
- Vocabulary levels
- Internet slang
- Unstated information and filler words
- Etiquette and gestures
- Physical differences
- Differences in surroundings
- Space, time, and technological limitations

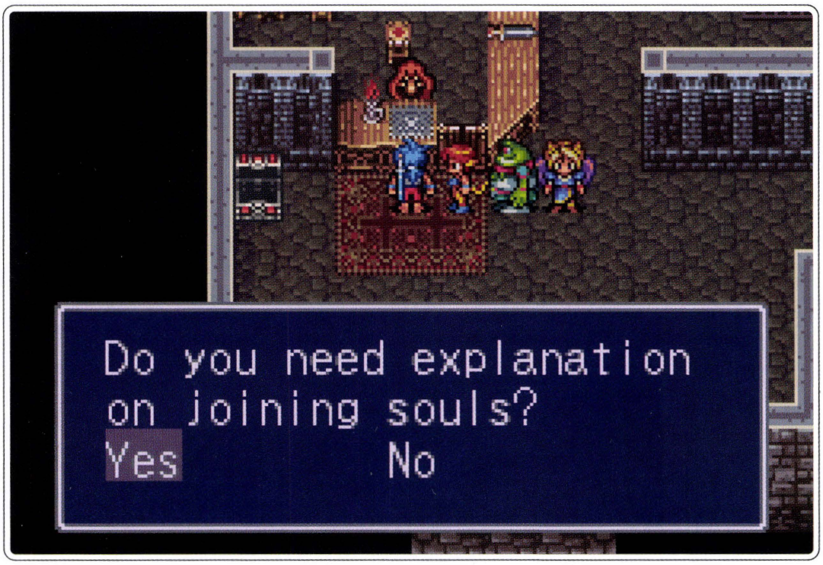
There are always new, unexpected challenges in translation, so this list is only the tip of the iceberg!

All Together

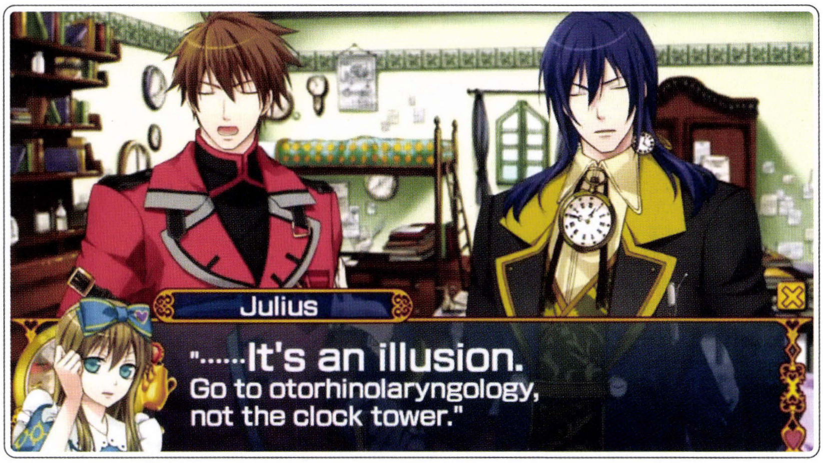
As we've seen in this chapter, a lot can get lost in translation if you only focus on the words used. Recognizing and preserving the *ideas* behind those words is arguably more important, and is at the heart of what localization is all about.

In this third *Legends of Localization* book, we'll look at the specific things that changed during *Undertale*'s translation process into Japanese. And given that the game relies so much on humor, unique speech patterns, cultural references, and more, there'll surely be a lot to discover!

It goes without saying that *Undertale*'s localization encountered almost every obstacle in this chapter, and more. It's such a big, strange game that I'd be shocked if it *had* been an easy, straightforward translation!

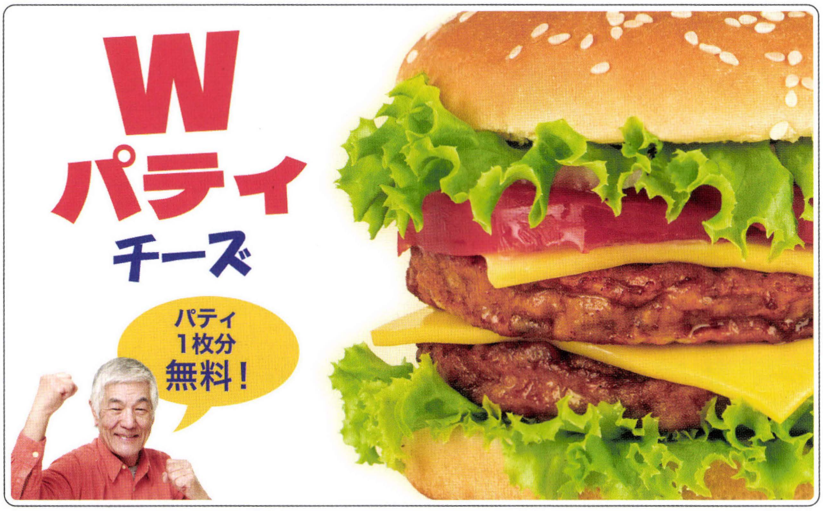

Do you need explanation on joining souls?

Simple words like "yes" and "no" don't always work the same way between languages, especially when a negative question is involved. In the literal English translation of this scene, choosing "yes" would effectively mean "no" and vice-versa (Game: *Breath of Fire II*)

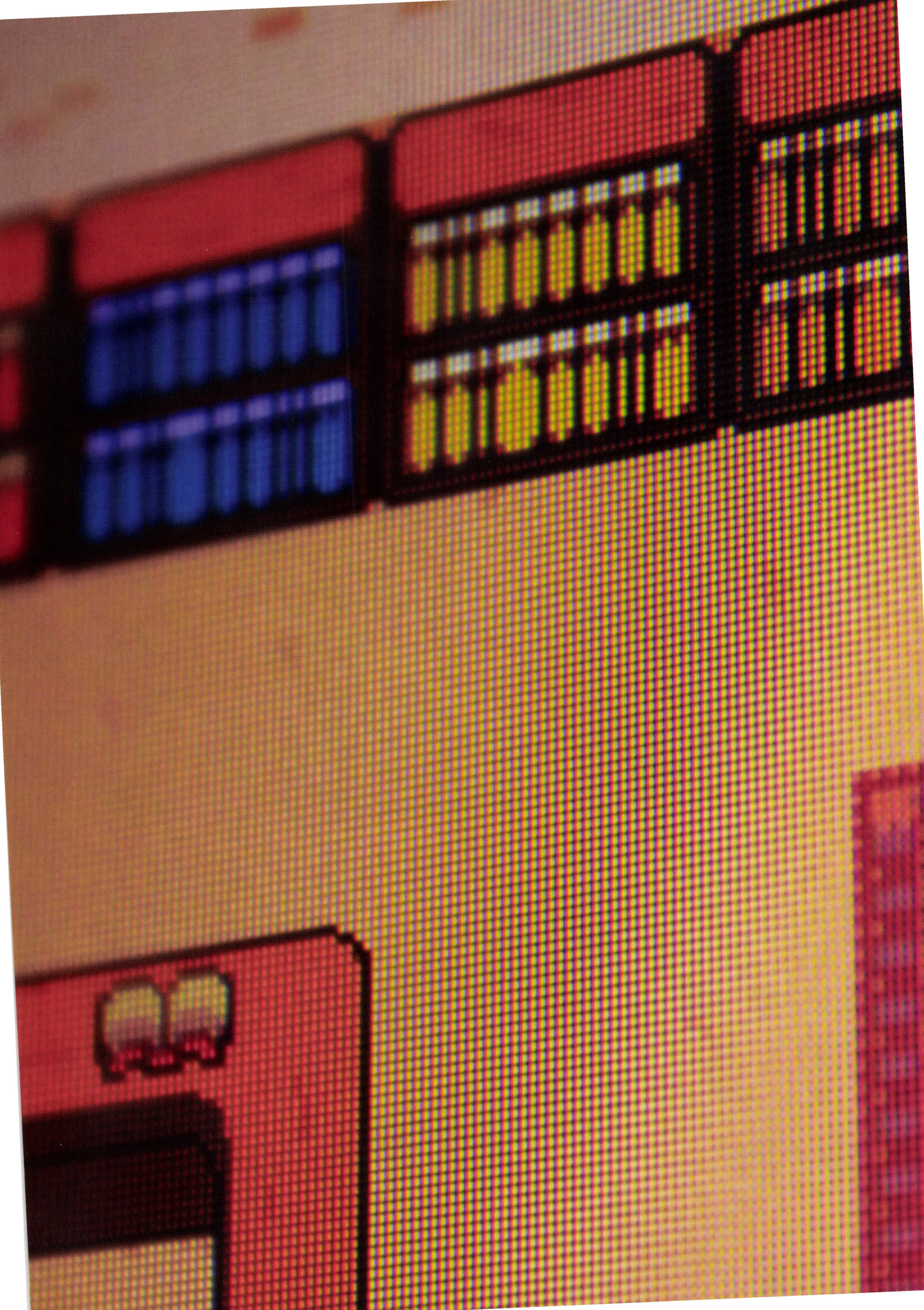


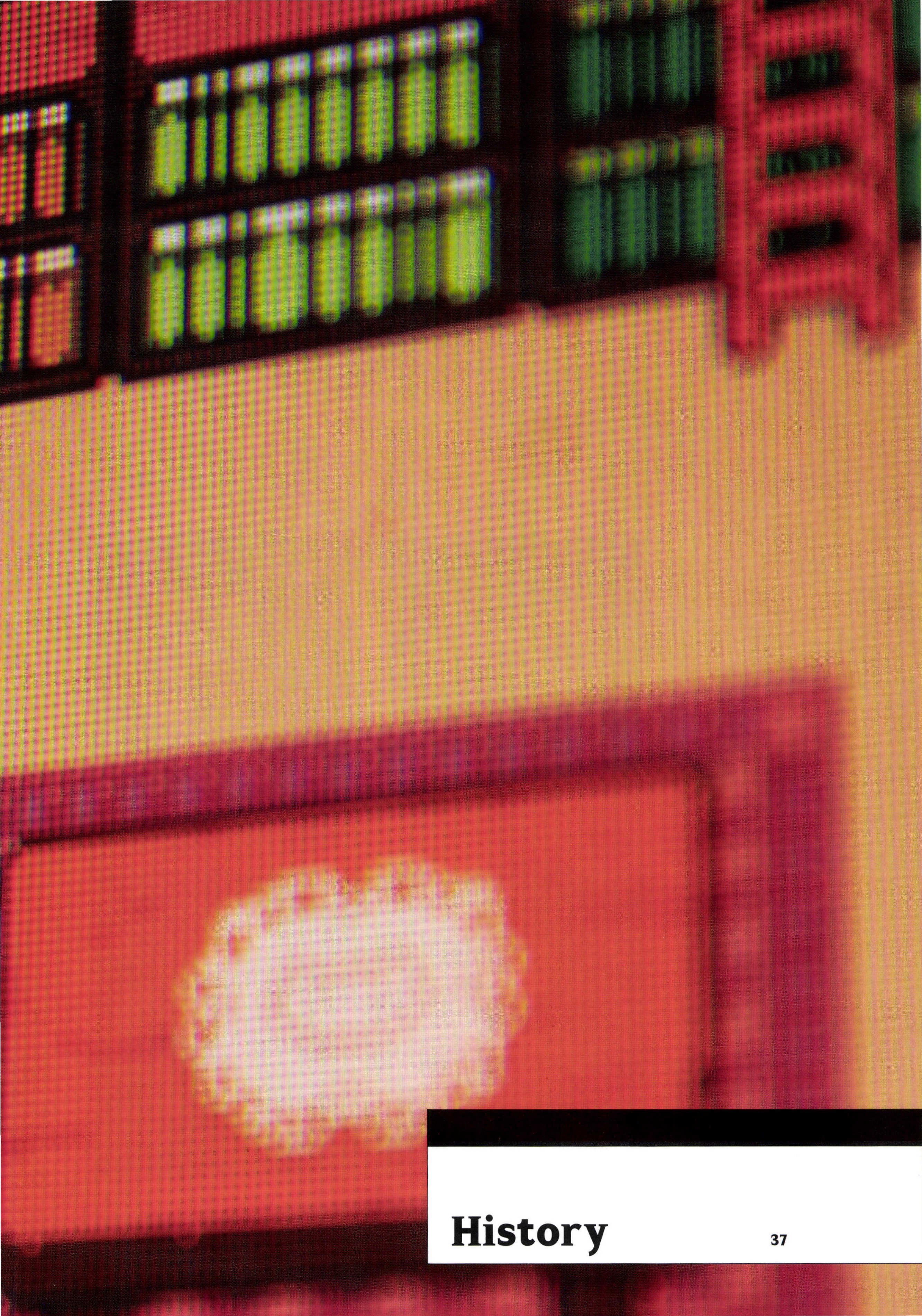
"……It's an illusion. Go to otorhinolaryngology, not the clock tower."

Sometimes a simple word in the source language isn't as simple in the target language. Translating word-for-word without consideration of the target audience can lead to weird results (Game: *Alice in the Heart ~Wonderful Wonder World~*)



The English letter "W" is regularly used in Japanese as a symbol for the word "double". Leaving this "W" as-is in translation can cause confusion for audiences outside of Japan





History

History

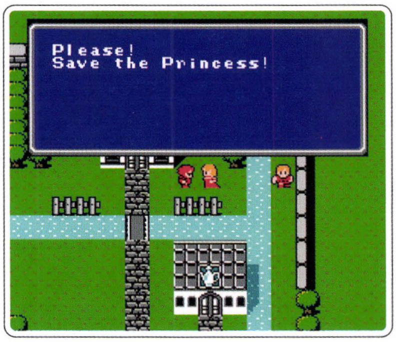
Before we examine *Undertale*'s English-to-Japanese localization in detail, it's important to know more about *Undertale* and its history.

Game Overview

Undertale is a popular, award-winning video game that debuted in 2015. It was created and developed largely by one person: Toby Fox.

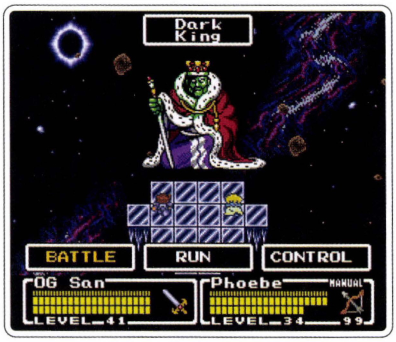
At first glance, *Undertale* doesn't seem particularly impressive – it has simple graphics, a strange battle system, and looks more like a fun little hobby project than a serious game. But first impressions can be deceiving: *Undertale* actually combines different game genres to create something fresh, sabotages veteran gamers' expectations about how games should work, and builds upon the foundation laid by previous generations of game creators.

At its core, for example, *Undertale* combines the gameplay of a classic Japanese role-playing game with the mechanics of "bullet hell" shoot-em-up games. This unique combination surprised gamers when *Undertale* debuted.

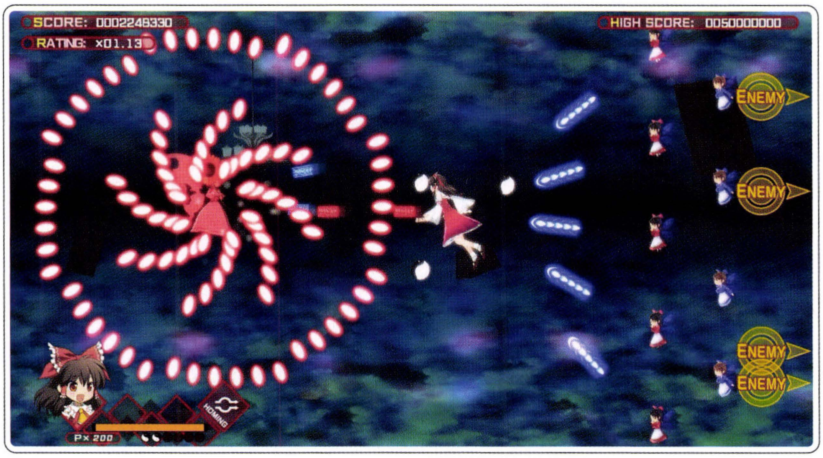


Please!
Save the Princess!

In Japanese RPGs, the player explores towns and dungeons while gathering information from villagers and other inhabitants


Dark King
BATTLE
RUN
CONTROL
OG San
LEVEL 41
Phoebe
MANUAL
LEVEL 34
99

In Japanese RPGs, players face a variety of enemies in battle. These battles are often turn-based and conducted via a menu system


SCORE: 0002248330
RATING: x01.13
HIGH SCORE: 0050000000
ENEMY
ENEMY
ENEMY
ENEMY
HOMING
Px 200

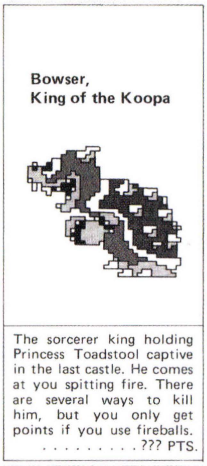
In bullet hell games, the player must dodge cascades of enemy bullets. Easy enemies have simple patterns, while tougher enemies use dizzyingly elaborate patterns

Morality

When you think about it, many video games basically boil down to "you beat up and/or kill the bad guys". It's almost the expected "default" of any game. This was true for beloved classics like *Pac-Man*, *Space Invaders*, and *Super Mario Bros.*, and it's just as true for games released today.

Undertale looks at things differently. Instead of hurting enemies, you can talk to them, flatter them, insult them, comfort them, mock them, befriend them, and more, until they lose the will to fight. In short, you can complete the game without killing anything or anyone. Or, if you want, you *can* slaughter everything you see – the choice is up to you. The game also changes with each choice you make, ensuring that no two *Undertale* experiences are exactly the same.

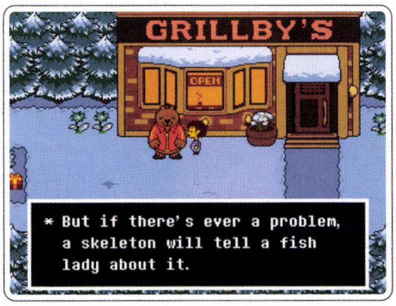
What kind of person are you, deep down? *Undertale* will show you.



**Bowser,
King of the Koopa**

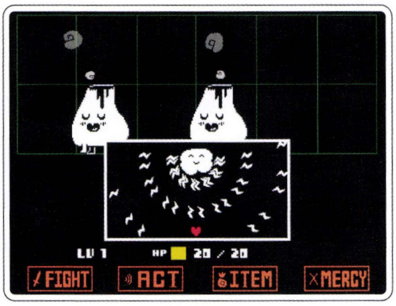
The sorcerer king holding Princess Toadstool captive in the last castle. He comes at you spitting fire. There are several ways to kill him, but you only get points if you use fireballs. . . . . ??? PTS.

Nintendo encourages players to literally kill enemies in *Super Mario Bros.*

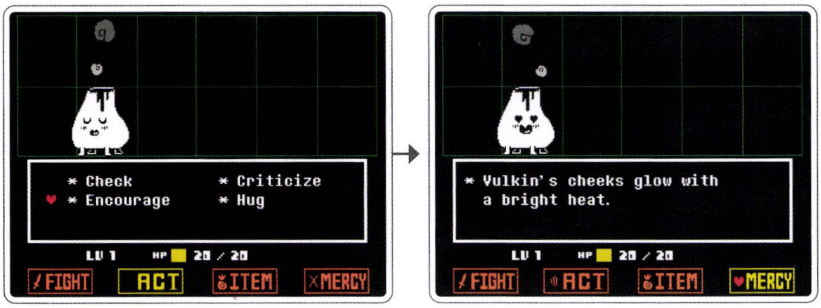


* But if there's ever a problem, a skeleton will tell a fish lady about it.

Undertale follows the standard Japanese RPG formula of exploring, talking, and fighting, but every aspect of the game has a surprising amount of charm and polish to it



Every enemy in *Undertale* has a uniquely themed "bullet hell" pattern that the player must react to in battle



* Vulkin's cheeks glow with a bright heat.

Enemies in *Undertale* are actual characters in the game with feelings and motivations of their own. You can treat them like standard video game battle fodder, or you can let them live and befriend them. The choice you make each time will change the game in big and small ways!

Who you are really does seem to impact your *Undertale* experience. Impatient players tend to rush through, kill everything, and skip all the text. Cautious players stop to analyze every choice. Judgmental players begin with an already unswayable opinion. Timid players constantly worry about upsetting enemies in battle. It's an interesting phenomenon to see!

The Man Behind the Game

Whether they want it or not, many successful authors, musicians, directors, and celebrities stand atop a pedestal of fame that puts them out of reach of the ordinary person. To some degree, this applies to video game creators, too.

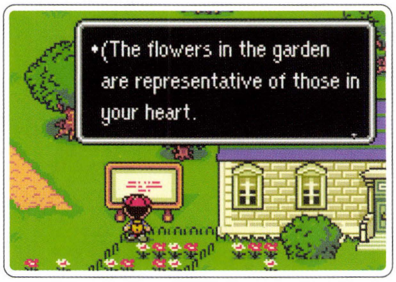
Toby Fox, the developer of *Undertale*, is the opposite: despite his fame, he's literally just an ordinary guy from the Internet who makes weird jokes and hangs out online. Here is his story.

1990s:

Toby grows up playing popular video games that are considered classics today. He's especially fond of Japanese role-playing games that have been translated into English. These games feature memorable stories, characters, and music.

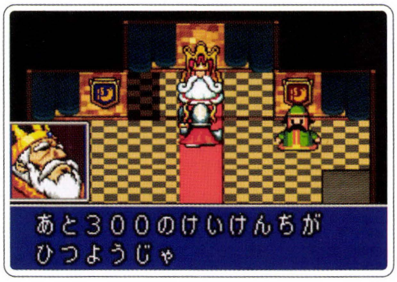
ELECTRONIC FARTS
EARTHBOUND 64

Toby plays a video game sometime in the 1990s (Note: Image may be a re-creation and not accurately representative of Toby in the 1990s.)



•(The flowers in the garden are representative of those in your heart.

Toby's fondness for Japanese RPGs led him to discover *EarthBound*, which would become a major inspiration in his own future work



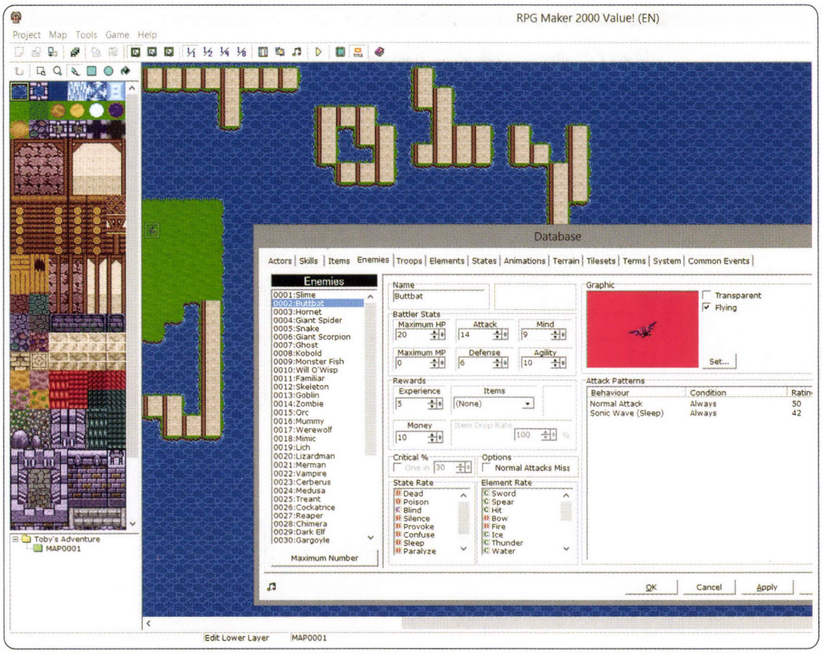
あと300のけいけんちが
ひつようじゃ

Despite the language barrier, Toby's early interest in RPGs would later inspire him to play Japanese games that had never been released in English

Of course, it's not accurate to say that Toby created *Undertale* entirely by himself. He received lots of help from friends and supporters during the game's development – everything from art to character design to fashion tips, and more. Although Toby did create the vast majority of the game, it would be unfair to discount the work of everyone else who contributed. Without their contributions, *Undertale* would be a noticeably different game today.

Early 2000s:

Toby's fondness for RPGs leads him to tools like *RPG Maker*, which allow users to create their own games without any programming knowledge. While in middle school, he begins creating his own small RPGs inspired by his favorite games. Most of his early projects are never finished, but he learns firsthand just how difficult it is to create large-scale games.


RPG Maker 2000 Value! (EN)
Project Map Tools Game Help
Database
Actors | Skills | Items Enemies | Troops | Elements | States | Animations | Terrain | Tilesets | Terms | System | Common Events
Maximum Number
Set...
OK
Cancel
Apply
Edit Lower Layer
MAP0001
Toby's Adventure
MAP0001

Enemies
0001:Slime
0002:Buttbat
0003:Hornet
0004:Giant Spider
0005:Snake
0006:Giant Scorpion
0007:Ghost
0008:Kobold
0009:Monster Fish
0010:Will O'Wisp
0011:Familiar
0012:Skeleton
0013:Goblin
0014:Zombie
0015:Orc
0016:Mummy
0017:Werewolf
0018:Mimic
0019:Lich
0020:Lizardman
0021:Merman
0022:Vampire
0023:Cerberus
0024:Medusa
0025:Treant
0026:Cockatrice
0027:Reaper
0028:Chimera
0029:Dark Elf
0030:Gargoyle

Name: Buttbat

Battler Stats
Maximum HP: 20
Attack: 14
Mind: 9
Maximum MP: 0
Defense: 6
Agility: 10

Rewards
Experience: 5
Items: (None)
Money: 10
Item Drop Rate: 100 %

Critical %: ☐ One in 30

Options: ☐ Normal Attacks Miss

State Rate
B Dead
B Poison
E Blind
B Silence
B Provoke
B Confuse
B Sleep
B Paralyze

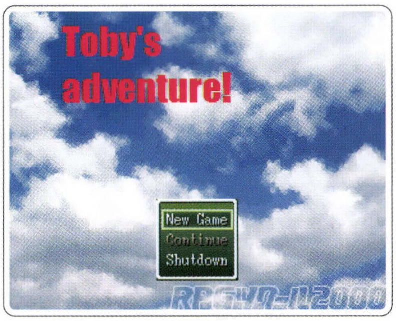
Element Rate
C Sword
C Spear
C Hit
B Bow
B Fire
C Ice
C Thunder
C Water

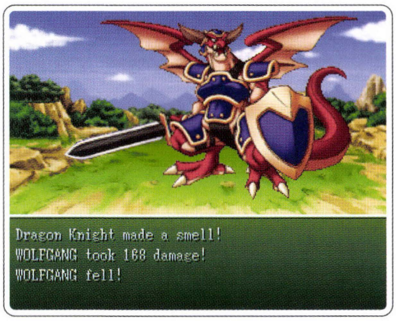
Graphic
☐ Transparent
☑ Flying

Attack Patterns

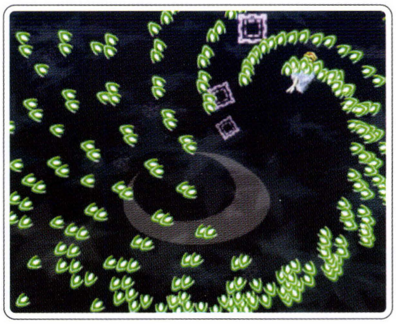
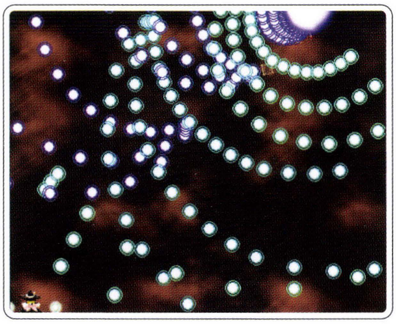
Behaviour	Condition	Ratin
Normal Attack	Always	50
Sonic Wave (Sleep)	Always	42

RPG Maker's easy-to-use tools made game development accessible to the average person, and fostered a whole new generation of game developers


Toby's adventure!
New Game
Continue
Shutdown
RPGMAKER2000


Dragon Knight made a smell!
WOLFGANG took 168 damage!
WOLFGANG fell!

According to Toby, his early creations made heavy use of *RPG Maker*'s pre-made, default assets to create games that looked something like these mock-up screenshots

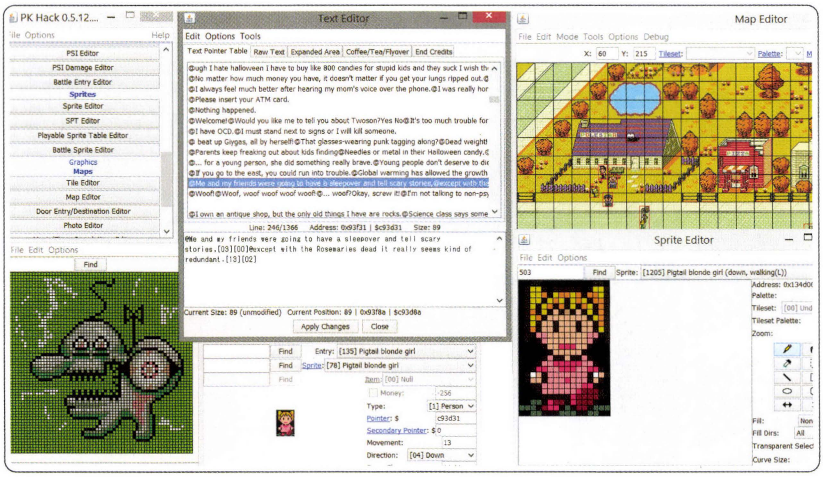



Toby became a fan of Japanese bullet hell games after discovering the popular but Japanese-only *Touhou* series

Mid 2000s:

Toby joins Starmen.Net, an online community for fans of *EarthBound*, an obscure Japanese RPG known as *MOTHER 2* in Japan. There, he finds that other fans have created tools to modify *EarthBound* to create completely new games. Toby helps improve these tools and uses them to create short games that are more impressive than his *RPG Maker* creations.

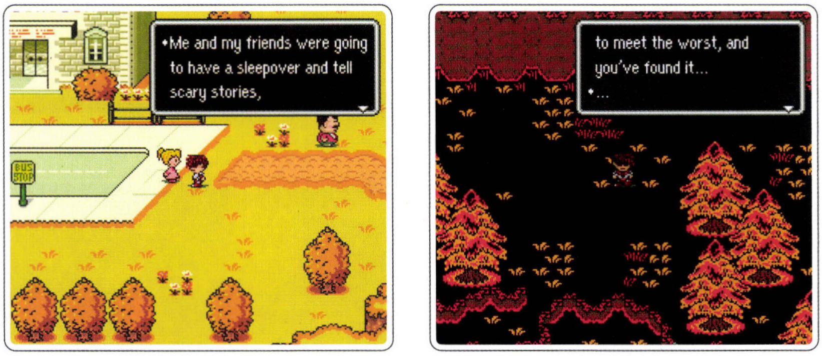
Toby's experience with the simple *RPG Maker* tools helped him quickly master the more complicated tools for modifying *EarthBound*


PK Hack 0.5.12....
File Options Help
PSI Editor
PSI Damage Editor
Battle Entry Editor
Sprites
Sprite Editor
SPT Editor
Playable Sprite Table Editor
Battle Sprite Editor
Graphics
Maps
Tile Editor
Map Editor
Door Entry/Destination Editor
Photo Editor
Text Editor
Edit Options Tools
Text Pointer Table
Raw Text
Expanded Area
Coffee/Tea/Flyover
End Credits
Apply Changes
Close
Find
Map Editor
File Edit Mode Tools Options Debug
Tileset:
Palette:
Sprite Editor
File Edit Options

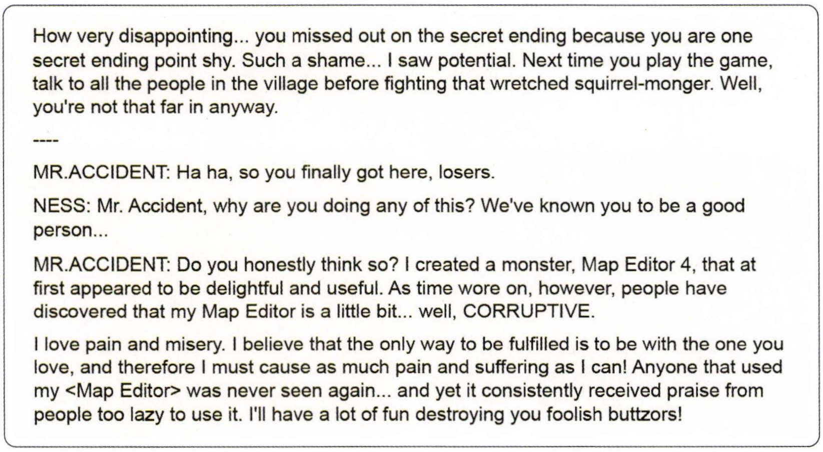
```
@ugh I hate halloween I have to buy like 800 candies for stupid kids and they suck I wish th
@No matter how much money you have, it doesn't matter if you get your lungs ripped out.@
@I always feel much better after hearing my mom's voice over the phone.@I was really hor
@Please insert your ATM card.
@Nothing happened.
@Welcome!@Would you like me to tell you about Twoson?Yes No@It's too much trouble for
@I have OCD.@I must stand next to signs or I will kill someone.
@ beat up Giygas, all by herself!@That glasses-wearing punk tagging along?@Dead weight!
@Parents keep freaking out about kids finding@Needles or metal in their Halloween candy.@
@... for a young person, she did something really brave.@Young people don't deserve to die
@If you go to the east, you could run into trouble.@Global warming has allowed the growth
@Me and my friends were going to have a sleepover and tell scary stories,@except with the
@Woof!@Woof, woof woof woof woof!@... woof?Okay, screw it!@I'm not talking to non-ps

@I own an antique shop, but the only old things I have are rocks.@Science class says some
Line: 246/1366    Address: 0x93f31 | $c93d31    Size: 89
@Me and my friends were going to have a sleepover and tell scary
stories,[03][00]@except with the Rosemaries dead it really seems kind of
redundant.[13][02]
Current Size: 89 (unmodified)  Current Position: 89 | 0x93f8a | $c93d8a
```

```
Entry: [135] Pigtail blonde girl
Sprite: [78] Pigtail blonde girl
Item: [00] Null
Money: -256
Type: [1] Person
Pointer: $ c93d31
Secondary Pointer: $ 0
Movement: 13
Direction: [04] Down
X: 60   Y: 215
503
Sprite: [1205] Pigtail blonde girl (down, walking(L))
Address: 0x134d0
Palette:
Tileset: [00] Und
Tileset Palette:
Zoom:
Fill:   Non
Fill Dirs:   All
Transparent Selec
Curve Size:
```

In the mid 2000s, Toby started modifying *EarthBound* to create all-new game experiences, such as this short and unsettling Halloween-themed RPG


•Me and my friends were going to have a sleepover and tell scary stories,
BUS STOP
to meet the worst, and you've found it...
•...

The sense of humor found in Toby's writing today was present even when he was a teenager



How very disappointing... you missed out on the secret ending because you are one secret ending point shy. Such a shame... I saw potential. Next time you play the game, talk to all the people in the village before fighting that wretched squirrel-monger. Well, you're not that far in anyway.

MR.ACCIDENT: Ha ha, so you finally got here, losers.

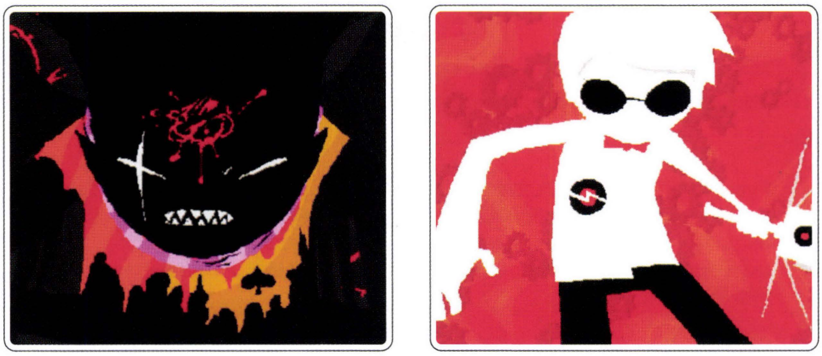
NESS: Mr. Accident, why are you doing any of this? We've known you to be a good person...

MR.ACCIDENT: Do you honestly think so? I created a monster, Map Editor 4, that at first appeared to be delightful and useful. As time wore on, however, people have discovered that my Map Editor is a little bit... well, CORRUPTIVE.

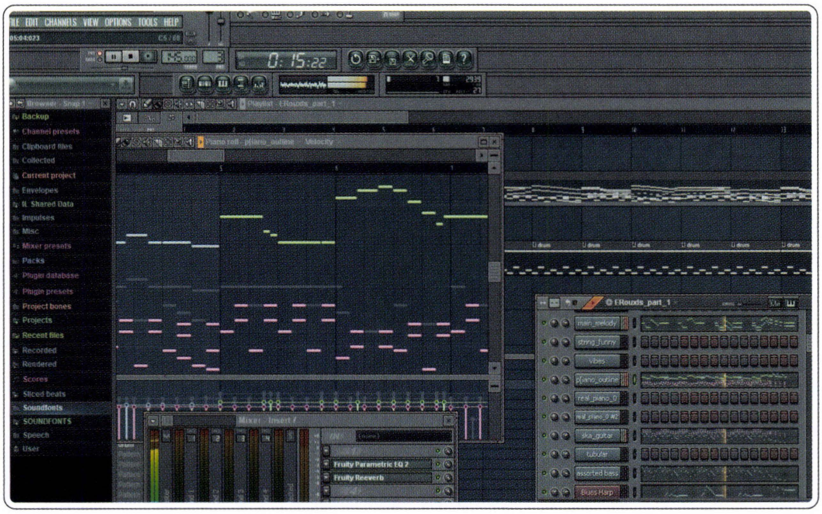
I love pain and misery. I believe that the only way to be fulfilled is to be with the one you love, and therefore I must cause as much pain and suffering as I can! Anyone that used my <Map Editor> was never seen again... and yet it consistently received praise from people too lazy to use it. I'll have a lot of fun destroying you foolish buttzors!

Late 2000s:

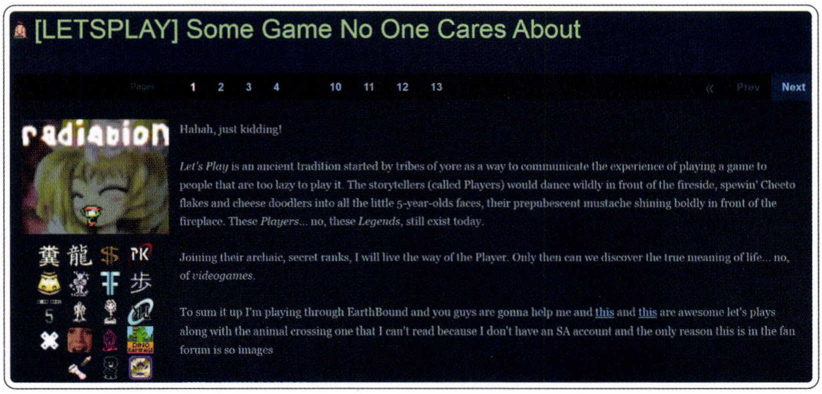
Toby joins a community for fans of *Homestuck*, a popular multimedia comic series. For fun, he remixes *Homestuck* music and shares it with other fans. The series creators, impressed by Toby's work, bring him on as an official music producer in 2010. Despite being entirely self-taught, Toby quickly becomes a revered musician in the *Homestuck* community. As a hobby, Toby also begins to design a video game that will eventually be known as *Undertale*.



Homestuck was partly inspired by *EarthBound*, making the *Homestuck* community a natural place for Toby to migrate to


FILE EDIT CHANNELS VIEW OPTIONS TOOLS HELP
0:15:22
Browser - Snap 1
Backup
Channel presets
Clipboard files
Collected
Current project
Envelopes
IL Shared Data
Impulses
Misc
Mixer presets
Packs
Plugin database
Plugin presets
Project bones
Projects
Recent files
Recorded
Rendered
Scores
Sliced beats
Soundfonts
SOUNDFONTS
Speech
User
Piano roll - piano_outline - Velocity
Mixer - Insert 7
Fruity Parametric EQ 2
Fruity Reeverb
ERounds_part_1
main_melody
string_funny
vibes
piano_outline
real_piano_0
ska_guitar
tubular
assorted bass
Blues Harp

By this point, Toby has learned how to use software to compose his own music


Pages 1 2 3 4 10 11 12 13 « Prev Next
radiation

[LETSPLAY] Some Game No One Cares About

Hahah, just kidding!

Let's Play is an ancient tradition started by tribes of yore as a way to communicate the experience of playing a game to people that are too lazy to play it. The storytellers (called Players) would dance wildly in front of the fireside, spewin' Cheeto flakes and cheese doodlers into all the little 5-year-olds faces, their prepubescent mustache shining boldly in front of the fireplace. These *Players*... no, these *Legends*, still exist today.

Joining their archaic, secret ranks, I will live the way of the Player. Only then can we discover the true meaning of life... no, of *videogames*.

To sum it up I'm playing through EarthBound and you guys are gonna help me and this and this are awesome let's plays along with the animal crossing one that I can't read because I don't have an SA account and the only reason this is in the fan forum is so images

Toby begins to dabble in interactive storytelling and discovers his personal style of mixing surreal comedy, emotion, and unpredictable story developments

2010s:

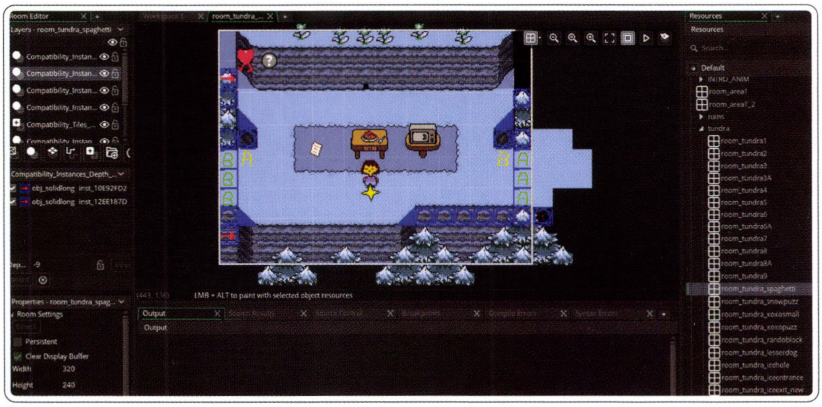
After receiving his university degree, Toby continues to compose music for *Homestuck* and design games for fun. During this time, he uses another game creation tool known known as *Game Maker* to continue developing *Undertale*.

Eventually, Toby releases a short, playable demo of *Undertale* to the public. The positive response encourages him to launch a crowdfunding campaign to fund further development. The campaign is a success, and allows Toby to spend the next two years developing the *Undertale* demo into a full-length game.

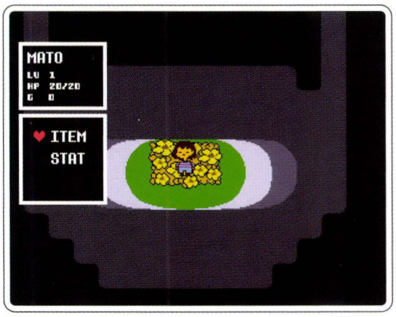
In 2015, Toby releases his full, finished version of *Undertale*. The once-naïve *RPG Maker* kid is now a professional game developer.

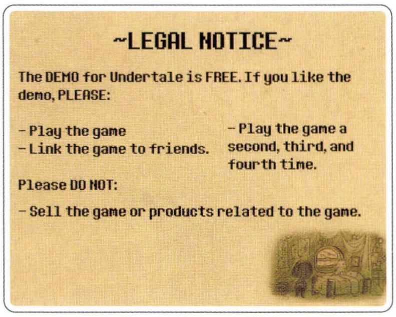
In 2013, Toby sent me helpful feedback for a game I was developing, and then hinted at a new game of his own that he was working on

> If you do any updates to the game, I might make it so NPCs can't walk through you. Also, a button to make the text scroll twice as fast (or instantly jump the ending position of the string) would be REALLY appreciated. After you've read the text once, scrolling through it all again gets kind of tiring.
>
> Also........ I'm working on a short (1hr) MOTHER-y RPG of my own right now. Depending on interest and my own sanity levels, I might try to assemble a team to create something amazing... I wonder if Fangamer would be potentially interested in helping...?
>
> UnderTale


Room Editor
Layers - room_tundra_spaghetti
room_tundra_...
Resources
Properties - room_tundra_spag...
Room Settings
Persistent
Clear Display Buffer
Width 320
Height 240
Output
LMB + ALT to paint with selected object resources

Toby uses *Game Maker* to develop a small game called "UnderTale" for his circle of friends to play and laugh at


MATO
LV 1
HP 20/20
G 0
ITEM
STAT



~LEGAL NOTICE~

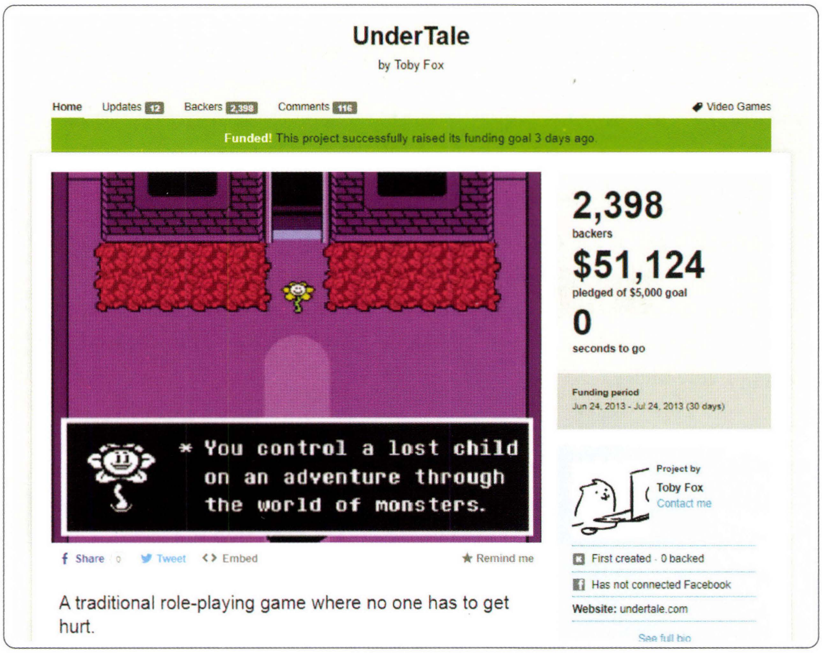
The DEMO for Undertale is FREE. If you like the demo, PLEASE:

- Play the game
- Link the game to friends.
- Play the game a second, third, and fourth time.

Please DO NOT:

- Sell the game or products related to the game.

Toby developed and released a short, free demo of his new game to gauge players' reactions



UnderTale

by Toby Fox

Home Updates 12 Backers 2,398 Comments 116 Video Games

Funded! This project successfully raised its funding goal 3 days ago.

* You control a lost child on an adventure through the world of monsters.

Share 0 Tweet Embed Remind me

A traditional role-playing game where no one has to get hurt.

2,398
backers

$51,124
pledged of $5,000 goal

0
seconds to go

Funding period
Jun 24, 2013 - Jul 24, 2013 (30 days)

Project by
Toby Fox
Contact me

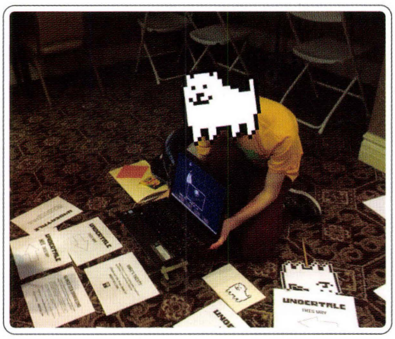
First created · 0 backed

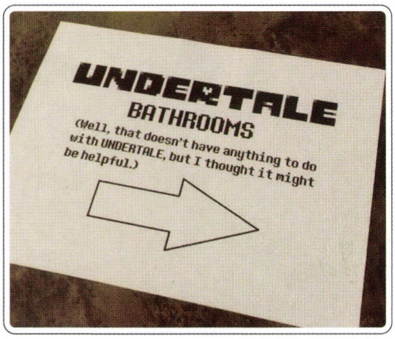
Has not connected Facebook

Website: undertale.com

See full bio

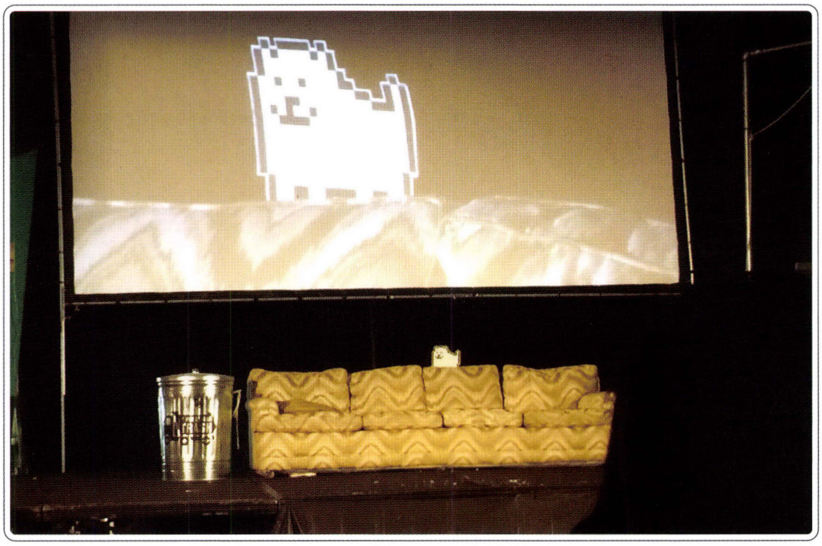
Toby's crowdfunding campaign for *Undertale* brought in ten times more money than he originally asked for




UNDERTALE
BATHROOMS
(Well, that doesn't have anything to do with UNDERTALE, but I thought it might be helpful.)

LEFT: Toby literally promotes his upcoming game, *Undertale*, on the floor of a hotel

RIGHT: Toby promotes his game some more



Toby promotes his upcoming game at an *EarthBound* convention, from behind an old couch, next to a garbage can

Release

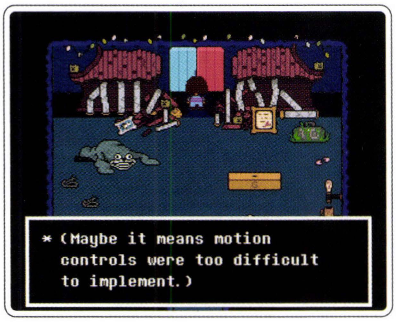
Undertale debuted on September 15, 2015, in English only, and only for home computers. Toby had wanted to release the game on mainstream game consoles too, but the *Game Maker* program he used to create *Undertale* didn't suitably support the newest consoles at the time.

In 2016, Toby teamed up with the Japanese company 8-4, Ltd. to localize his computer game into Japanese. During the localization process, 8-4 offered to perform the additional technical work needed to release *Undertale* on game consoles as well. The shared hope was that a console release could make *Undertale* accessible to a wider audience in Japan, where computer gaming was relatively niche.

Over the next several years, Toby and 8-4 released *Undertale* for Japanese computers and a variety of game consoles, including the PlayStation 4, the PlayStation Vita, the Nintendo Switch, and the Xbox One. Each port included new and exclusive content, along with the option to switch the game's text between English and Japanese at any time.

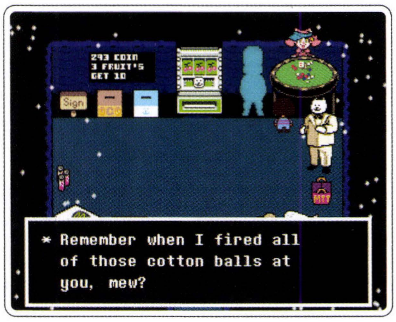
PS4
UNDERTALE
PS VITA
UNDERTALE
Xbox O
UNDERTALE
fangamer

Undertale was only available via download at first, but received physical releases in limited quantities starting in 2017



* (Maybe it means motion controls were too difficult to implement.)

The Nintendo Switch release of *Undertale* includes an exclusive secret room and a secret battle with a familiar character



* Remember when I fired all of those cotton balls at you, mew?

The Xbox One release of *Undertale* includes a secret casino area and other bits of exclusive content

Response

After its release in 2015, *Undertale* enjoyed major success in almost every way.

Sales-wise, *Undertale* was a clear success. Through word of mouth, the game sold over 500,000 copies in its first three months. That number has since reached into the millions – a level usually only achieved by industry titans like Nintendo and Sony.

Undertale also achieved critical success – the game received acclaim from game critics, reviewers, and industry veterans alike. News of *Undertale*'s success even reached mainstream outlets, which led to further recognition outside gaming circles.

> “*It was a whispered reminder that great games can do more than impress with sheer complexity and breadth, they can also draw us in close to them as to engage with our humanity.*” —GIANT BOMB

> “*Undertale is a post-modern masterpiece. Toby Fox, its creator, has produced a work of interactive narrative art that is moving, surreal – and fiendishly clever.*” —THE NATIONAL

> “*Toby Fox, forces us [...] to really think about why we do the things we do in games by utilizing a mix of humor, regret, and relationships to form one of the most important game releases of 2015.*” —VENTURE BEAT

Within months of its release, *Undertale* was nominated for dozens of industry accolades and even won a few:

- Nominated for Best RPG (THE GAME AWARDS, 2015)
- Runner-up for Best Indie (GLOBAL GAME AWARDS, 2015)
- Nominated for Outstanding Achievement in Game Direction (19TH ANNUAL D.I.C.E. AWARDS, 2016)
- Nominated for Best Story (12TH BRITISH ACADEMY GAMES AWARDS, 2016)
- Winner of Audience Award (INDEPENDENT GAMES FESTIVAL AWARDS, 2016)
- Winner of Best Original Role Playing Game (NAVGTR AWARDS)

Undertale was also a hit with players. A massive fan following grew overnight. *Undertale* costumes were suddenly everywhere. *Undertale* concerts with full symphony orchestras were held around the world. Countless *Undertale* fan games and *Undertale*-inspired games were shared online. Even sketchy bootleg companies began pumping out every type of poor quality *Undertale* merchandise imaginable.

You know you've hit it big when the ideas that came out of your brain have suddenly taken on bootleg form

At the same time, fans around the world clamored to play *Undertale* in their native languages. Before long, fans translated the game into over a dozen languages. These unofficial translations helped non-English speakers experience the game, which led to further recognition and success.

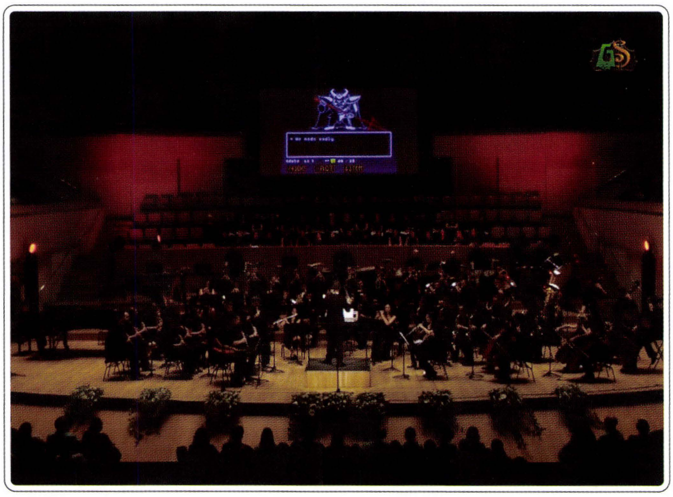
In short, *Undertale* was a big deal for many people: fans, critics, the game industry, and, of course, Toby himself.

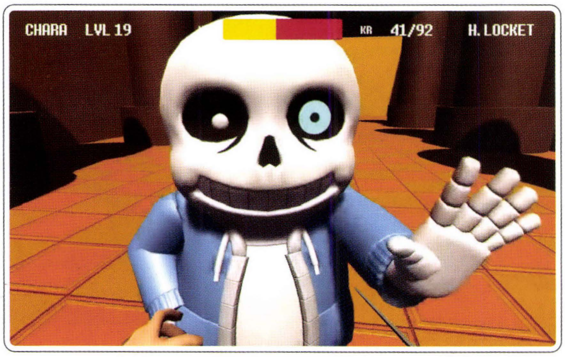
Undertale fans share their love for the game by dressing up as their favorite characters, making fan videos, writing spin-off stories, and more

METTATON LIVE: METROCON

Pro wrestler Kenny Omega enters the ring with *Undertale* flair

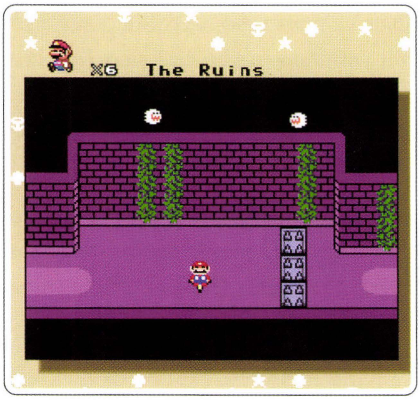
Undertale's music is celebrated around the world by prestigious symphony orchestras such as *Games&Symphonies*, seen here

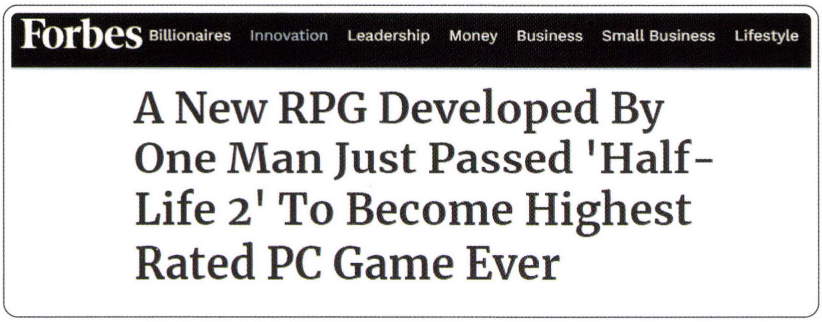



CHARA LVL 19
KR 41/92
H. LOCKET

Undertale inspired countless fans to design and create their own games, just as Toby was inspired years before

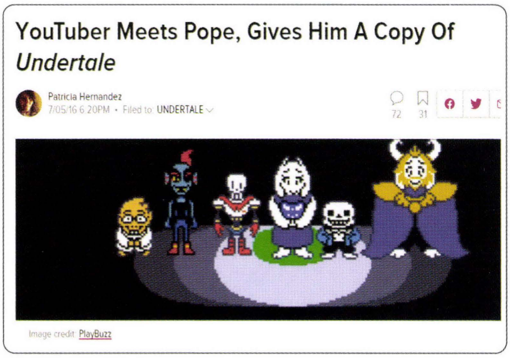
Similarly, some fans learned to modify old, classic games to create new experiences, like this *Super Mario World*-themed *Undertale* tribute game





A New RPG Developed By One Man Just Passed 'Half-Life 2' To Become Highest Rated PC Game Ever

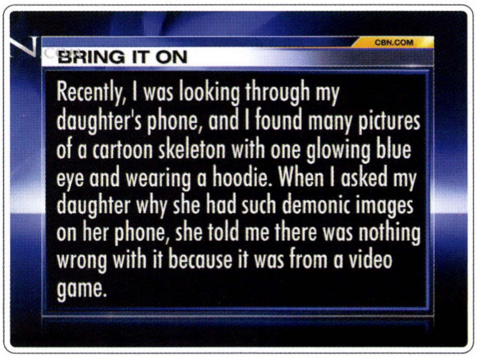
Undertale was a massive success among players and critics alike



YouTuber Meets Pope, Gives Him A Copy Of *Undertale*

Patricia Hernandez
7/05/16 6:20PM · Filed to: UNDERTALE

Image credit: PlayBuzz

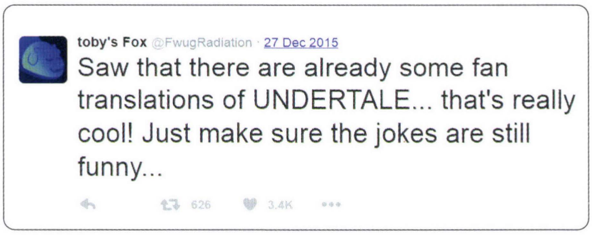


BRING IT ON

Recently, I was looking through my daughter's phone, and I found many pictures of a cartoon skeleton with one glowing blue eye and wearing a hoodie. When I asked my daughter why she had such demonic images on her phone, she told me there was nothing wrong with it because it was from a video game.

News is made when an *Undertale* fan gives the Pope a copy of *Undertale*

A popular character from *Undertale* causes concern for the Christian Broadcasting Network



toby's Fox @FwugRadiation · 27 Dec 2015

Saw that there are already some fan translations of UNDERTALE... that's really cool! Just make sure the jokes are still funny...

Toby gives his implied approval for fans to translate *Undertale* into other languages

Toby at an awards show, standing alongside legendary game designers Tim Schafer (*Monkey Island* series, *Grim Fandango*), Alexey Pajitnov (*Tetris*), and Patrice Désilets (*Assassins Creed* series)

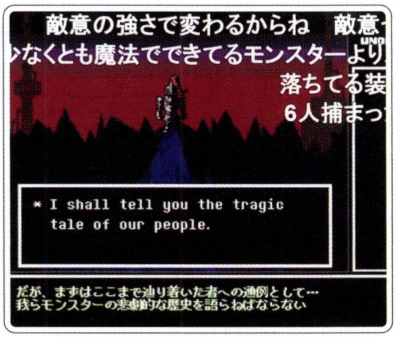
Japanese Releases

When *Undertale* debuted in English in September 2015, it wasn't locked to a single region – gamers anywhere in the world could purchase it. The game was only available in English, however, and could only be played on home computers.

This language barrier, coupled with the need for a computer, made the game inaccessible for most Japanese gamers. As a result, *Undertale* experienced a very different "release history" in Japan that can be divided into three distinct stages.

Stage #1: Videos

NicoNico Douga video comments are displayed as text overlays that appear at specified times. This unique feature turned the early *Undertale* translation videos into a large, shared experience and established the earliest Japanese *Undertale* fan community



敵意の強さで変わるからね　敵意
なくとも魔法でできてるモンスターより
落ちてる装
6人捕まっ

* I shall tell you the tragic
tale of our people.

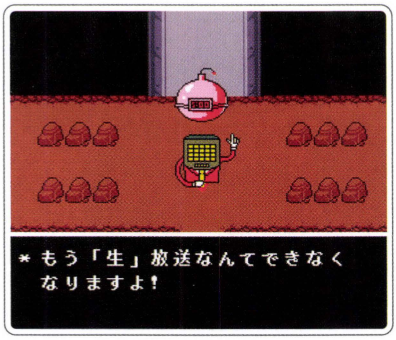
だが、まずはここまで辿り着いた者への通例として…
我らモンスターの悲劇的な歴史を語らねばならない

In October 2015, several weeks after *Undertale*'s English release, a Japanese gamer began to upload a series of *Undertale* gameplay videos to *NicoNico Douga*, a popular Japanese video site. These videos, which were painstakingly edited to include Japanese translations of all the English text, quickly gained impressive view counts.

Because these early *Undertale* translations were presented as online videos, viewers could use the comment sections to react to the game as a community and to point out translation problems. Although these early video translations helped foster awareness and appreciation for *Undertale* in Japan, the game remained a small, niche secret until early 2016.

Stage #2: Fan Translation

Six months after *Undertale*'s English release, Japanese fans released a self-made, unofficial translation patch that replaced all of the game's English text with Japanese text



* もう「生」放送なんてできなく
なりますよ!

In March 2016, fans released an unofficial translation "patch" that could replace all of the original English text in the game with translated Japanese text. At last, Japanese gamers could play *Undertale* for themselves in their native language. The fan community quickly exploded in size, and videos of the fan translation spread awareness of the game even further.

Although this unofficial translation made the game playable in Japanese, other barriers stood in the way. First, the vast majority of Japanese gamers at the time relied on mainstream gaming systems or mobile devices to play games, not home computers. Players would also need to be savvy enough to buy the original game from English-language websites, download the translation patch from elsewhere, decompress the files, apply the patch successfully, and deal with any technical issues along the way. Thus *Undertale* remained inaccessible to most Japanese gamers.

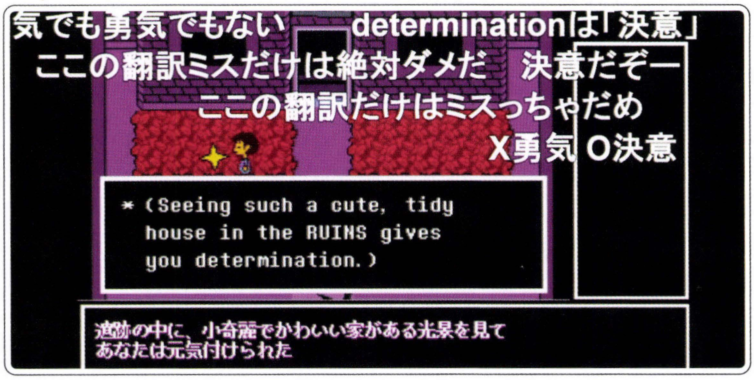
Stage #3: Official Translation

In November 2016, Toby announced an official Japanese version of *Undertale* was in the works. In August 2017, it was released for home computers, the PlayStation Vita handheld system, and the monstrously popular PlayStation 4 console. The game was released again for the Nintendo Switch in 2018, and the Xbox One in 2021.

Finally, nearly two years after its English debut, Japanese gamers could play *Undertale* in their native language, legitimately, and on all the popular game systems. This official release propelled *Undertale* into the spotlight, grabbing the attention of players and critics alike.

Undertale's Early, Unofficial Japanese Translations

Early Japanese fans relied on unofficial translations to experience *Undertale*. While clearly the product of passion and good intentions, these translations included genuine mistakes, misunderstandings, and oversights. Even so, the translators' enthusiasm still shone brightly enough to captivate fans.



気でも勇気でもない

determinationは「決意」

ここの翻訳ミスだけは絶対ダメだ

決意だぞー

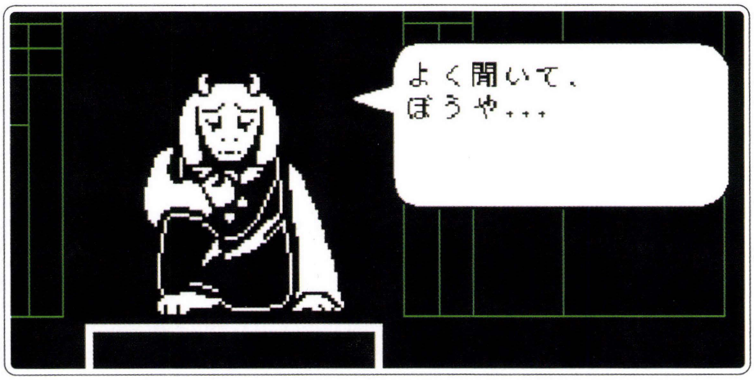
ここの翻訳だけはミスっちゃだめ

X勇気 O決意

* (Seeing such a cute, tidy
house in the RUINS gives
you determination.)

遺跡の中に、小奇麗でかわいい家がある光景を見て
あなたは元気付けられた

Japanese video translation viewers point out that the word "determination", an important term in *Undertale*'s story, has been mistranslated as *genki* ("energetic; good health; high spirits")



よく聞いて、
ぼうや...

Although the main character's gender is left unstated in *Undertale*, the fan-made translation implies the character is male by using words like ぼうや (*bōya*, "boy; lad; sonny")

Japanese Response

For the first two years after its original release, *Undertale* gained a small and wholly devoted following in Japan. As a foreign indie game, however, it didn't catch the attention of mainstream gamers or news outlets during this time.

Following *Undertale*'s official Japanese release in 2017, its recognition skyrocketed. The response to the game closely mirrored that of the English version's debut, and it achieved success in almost every way.

Although *Undertale* was originally only available to purchase as a digital download, it consistently sold well in Japan. Almost immediately, it topped digital sales charts and even broke into the standard sales charts.

Undertale was a critical success in Japan as well. Game critics, news outlets, and industry legends showered the game with praise.

> “ *A nearly flawless game in every way, Undertale truly stands as the king of indie games.”* —DENGEKI PLAYSTATION

> “ *It may look like a plain and simple retro-style game, but it boasts groundbreaking game design and offers players a radically new gameplay experience.”* —FAMITSU

> “ *If you have time to read this review, just go play the game instead.”* —IGN JAPAN

> “ *As a game, Undertale fully represents our “determination” to look toward an era of peace that we must reach someday, in spite of the evils that still exist today.”* —DENFAMI NICO GAMER

> “ *No other single game in my life has given me as many surprises, as many tears, as many laughs, as many frights, and as much joy.”* —MOGURA GAMES

Undertale won prestigious game awards in Japan, including the Indie Games & Game Developers Award at the 2017 PlayStation Awards. It also won an Excellence Award at the 2018 Japan Game Awards, which is held by the Japanese government's Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry.

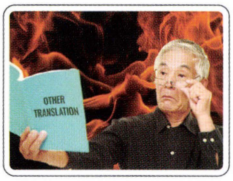
Undertale was a hit among Japanese players as well. The game received recognition at small fan events, at major professional events, on national television, and more. Rival magazines competed to interview Toby for exclusive articles. Japanese fans showered Toby with drawings, videos, and thank-you messages.

Lastly, the response to *Undertale*'s Japanese release brought Toby significant professional success. Suddenly, *Undertale* characters and music began to make cameos in colossal hits like the *Super Smash Bros.* and *Taiko Drum Master* series. Legendary game creators met with Toby to inquire about collaborative projects. Toby was even invited to compose music for a new *Pokémon* game.

By all accounts, *Undertale* was as big a hit in Japan as it was in the rest of the world – maybe even bigger.

Criticism of Competing Translations

Whenever something receives multiple translations, an interesting psychological phenomenon takes shape: **people tend to unconsciously cling to the very first translation they encounter, and compare all other translations against it.** I call this phenomenon "imprinting", based on a psychological term that refers to how newborn animals naturally bond to the first things they learn to recognize.



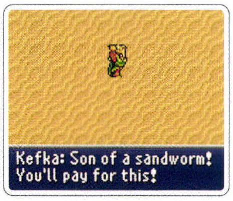
Dachi, a 10th-century translator said: *"I am apprehensive [...] Translating [a book] again is a great sin, because the second translation will appear to be a hostile act against the first"*

In translation, this imprinting phenomenon often leads to an excessive, irrational attachment to the first translation you encounter, regardless of the translation's quality or genuine flaws. Imprinting isn't limited to translation, of course, and can potentially occur with any sort of first experience.

Undertale's official Japanese release caused two general groups to form: fans who first experienced the fan translations, and fans who first experienced the official translation.

Naturally, some imprinted fan-translation players were quick to criticize the new translation. Just the announcement of an official Japanese release prompted these fans to use phrases like "war criminals", "unfaithful", and "pointless".

Conversely, some fans who played the official translation first were quick to criticize the unofficial fan translations. These newer fans described the unofficial translations with phrases like "brain damage", "cheesy", and "trying too hard".



Kefka: Son of a sandworm! You'll pay for this!

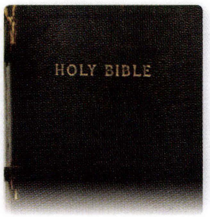
Final Fantasy VI's multiple English translations have produced intense imprinting reactions in fans over the years

Interestingly, a third group of fans responded to the official release with comments like "a true fan will play both then interpret stuff however they want" and "the official and unofficial translation factions are already waging war, I think I'm gonna get some popcorn and beer and laugh my ass off".

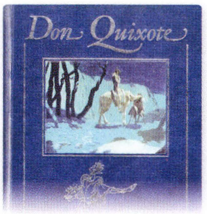
It's important to note that this fiery translation debate only took place within a small, loud segment of the fandom. Over time, these arguments cooled down as the official translation took hold. Today, the fan-made translations remain well regarded and serve as examples of the Japanese community's spirit.

The Significance of "Competing Translations"

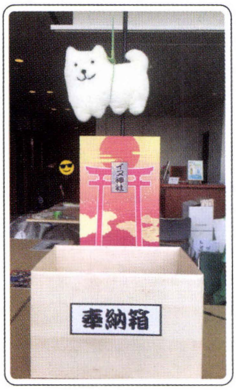
The practice of retranslation has probably existed as long as language has. Although it's easy to view retranslations in a competitive light, the total number of "competing translations" can also be seen as a rough indicator of the source material's cultural significance.



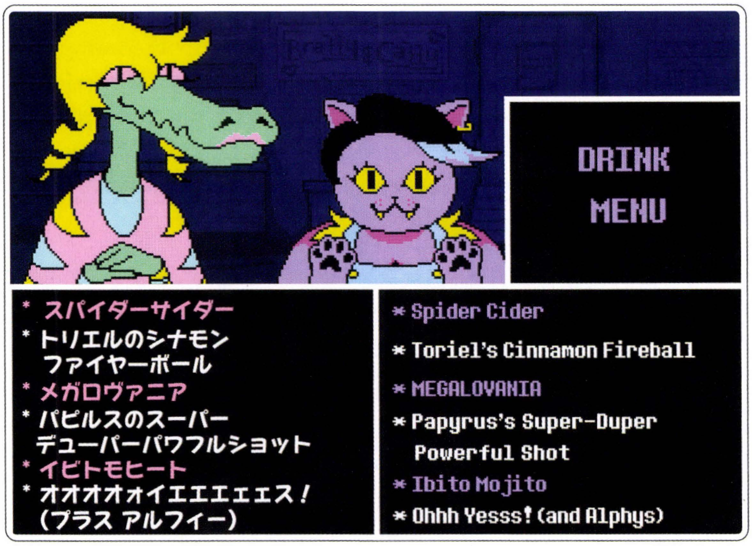
The Holy Bible has been retranslated into English hundreds of times over the centuries



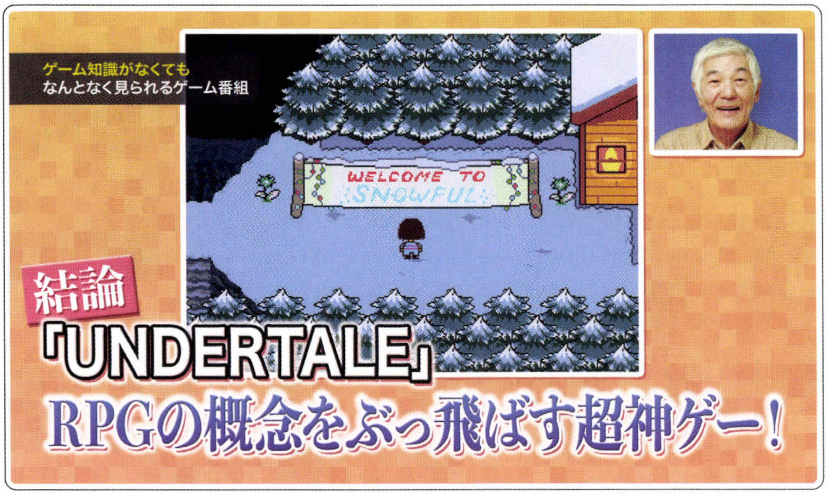
Don Quixote has been retranslated into English about a dozen times over the past 400 years



At a Japanese event, fans happily offered art, manga, and the like at a makeshift *Undertale* shrine

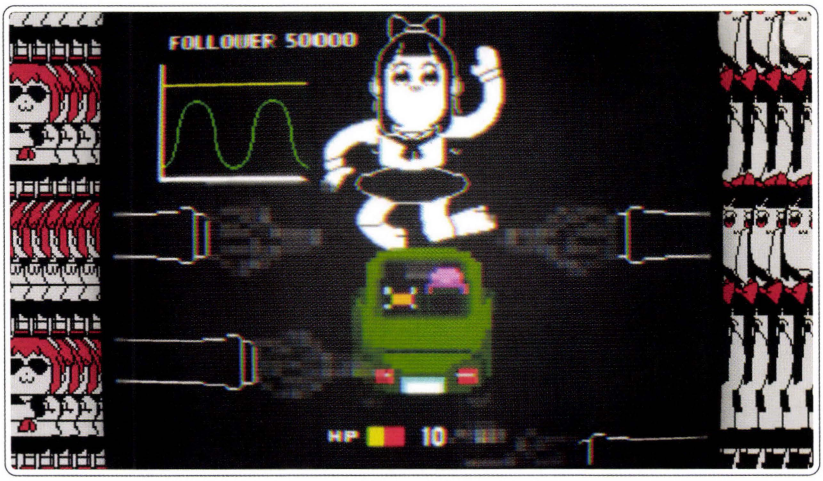

DRINK
MENU
* スパイダーサイダー
* トリエルのシナモン
ファイヤーボール
* メガロヴァニア
* パピルスのスーパー
デューパーパワフルショット
* イビトモヒート
* オオオオォイエエエェエス！
（プラス アルフィー）
* Spider Cider
* Toriel's Cinnamon Fireball
* MEGALOVANIA
* Papyrus's Super-Duper
Powerful Shot
* Ibito Mojito
* Ohhh Yesss! (and Alphys)

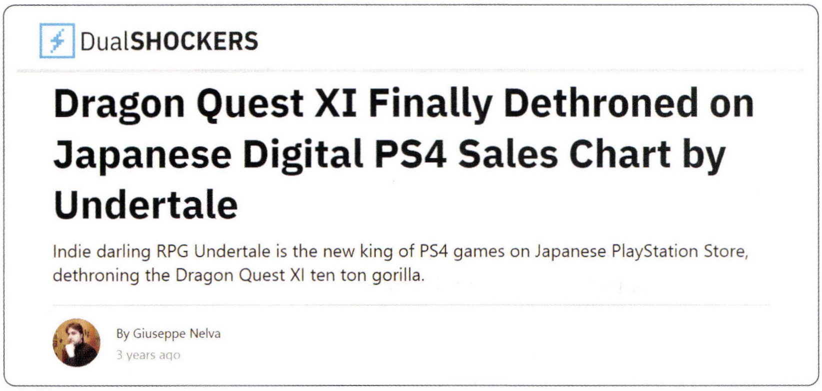
A small official launch party was held to celebrate *Undertale*'s Japanese release


ゲーム知識がなくても
なんとなく見られるゲーム番組
WELCOME TO
SNOWFUL
結論
「UNDERTALE」
RPGの概念をぶっ飛ばす超神ゲー！

Undertale appears on various Japanese TV shows every so often

Pop Team Epic, a popular Japanese entertainment series, frequently references *Undertale* in its jokes


FOLLOWER 50000
HP
10



DualSHOCKERS

Dragon Quest XI Finally Dethroned on Japanese Digital PS4 Sales Chart by Undertale

Indie darling RPG Undertale is the new king of PS4 games on Japanese PlayStation Store, dethroning the Dragon Quest XI ten ton gorilla.

By Giuseppe Nelva
3 years ago

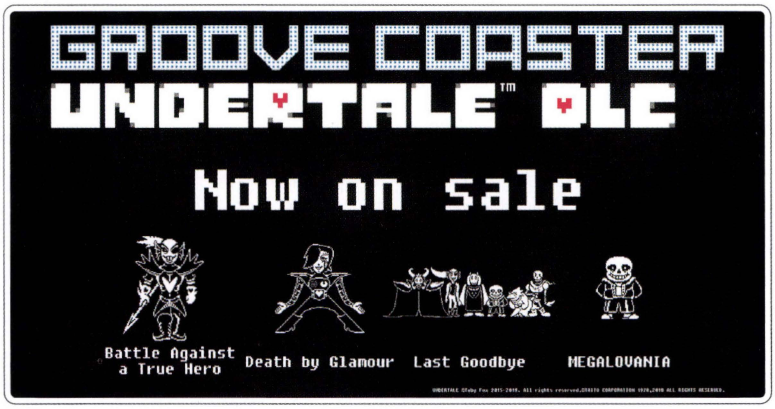
Undertale shot to the top of multiple sales charts in Japan after its official Japanese release

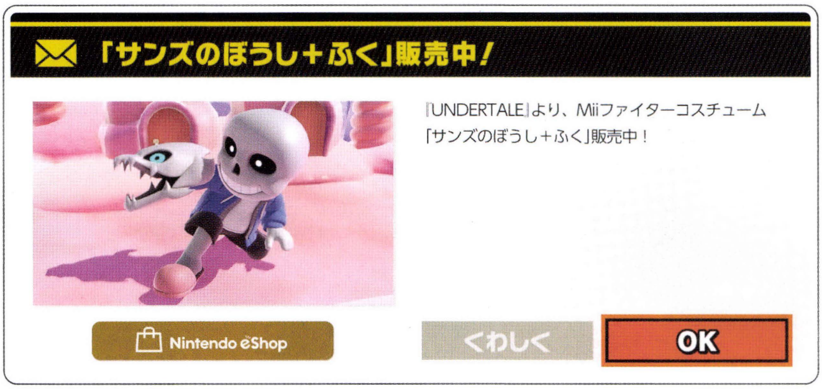
Undertale concerts come in many sizes in Japan. This one took place in Japan's most prestigious event hall, where the Beatles played 50 years earlier

Toby accepts a Japanese video game award from Sony, but I dunno, that just looks like some annoying dog to me

PlayStation Awards 2017
INDIES & DEVELOPER
UNDERTALE
ゲームデザイナー/プログラマー/コンポーザー
トビー　フォックス

Game companies like Nintendo, Namco Bandai, and TAITO reached out to Toby for *Undertale* crossover content and collaborations


GROOVE COASTER
UNDERTALE™ DLC
Now on sale
Battle Against a True Hero
Death by Glamour
Last Goodbye
MEGALOVANIA
UNDERTALE ©Toby Fox 2015-2018. All rights reserved.©TAITO CORPORATION 1978,2018 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



「サンズのぼうし＋ふく」販売中！

『UNDERTALE』より、Miiファイターコスチューム
「サンズのぼうし＋ふく」販売中！

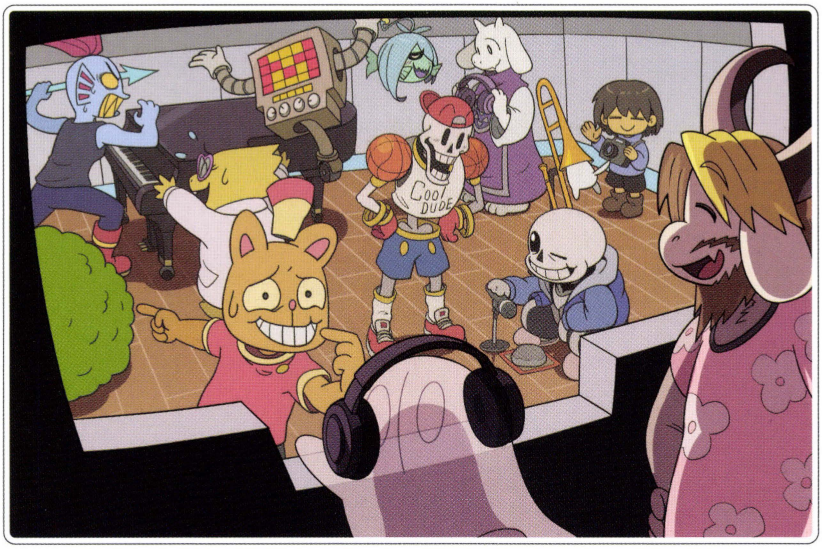
Nintendo eShop
くわしく
OK

The gaming world was shocked when Nintendo added *Undertale* content to the ultra-popular *Super Smash Bros.* series

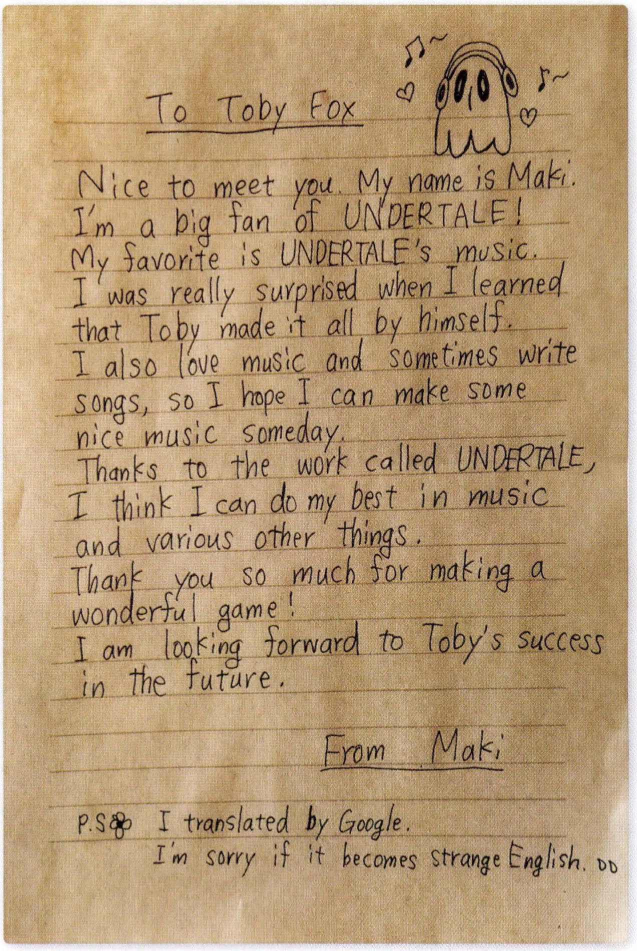
UNDERTALE
この本
リコメンド
推します。
GCCX 有野課長

▲
Undertale is highly regarded by famous video game celebrities and experts in Japan

Toby meets Shigesato Itoi, the legendary creator of the *MOTHER/EarthBound* series ▶



Japanese fans share their love for *Undertale* with the world in art form



To Toby Fox

Nice to meet you. My name is Maki.
I'm a big fan of UNDERTALE!
My favorite is UNDERTALE's music.
I was really surprised when I learned
that Toby made it all by himself.
I also love music and sometimes write
songs, so I hope I can make some
nice music someday.
Thanks to the work called UNDERTALE,
I think I can do my best in music
and various other things.
Thank you so much for making a
wonderful game!
I am looking forward to Toby's success
in the future.

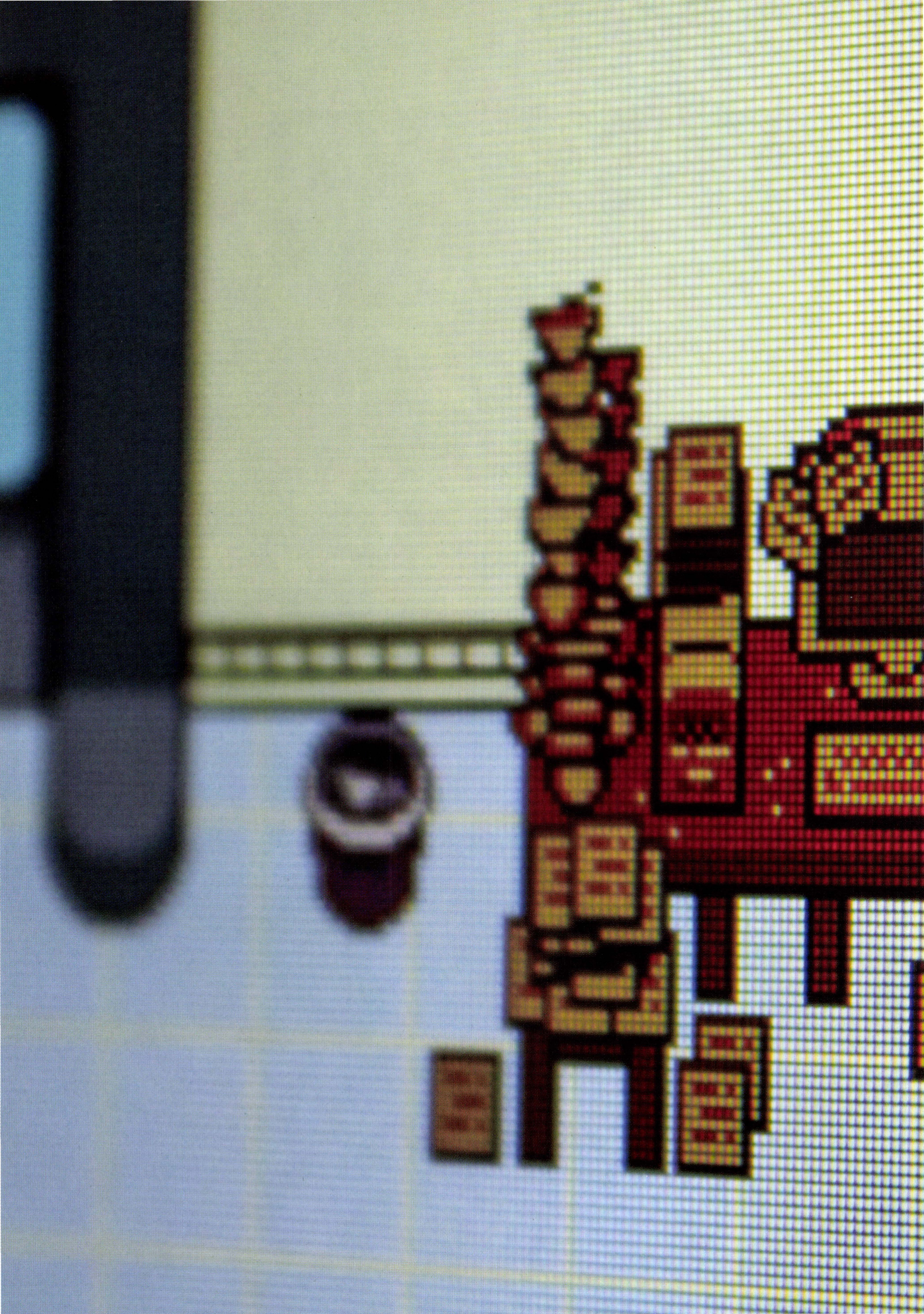
From Maki

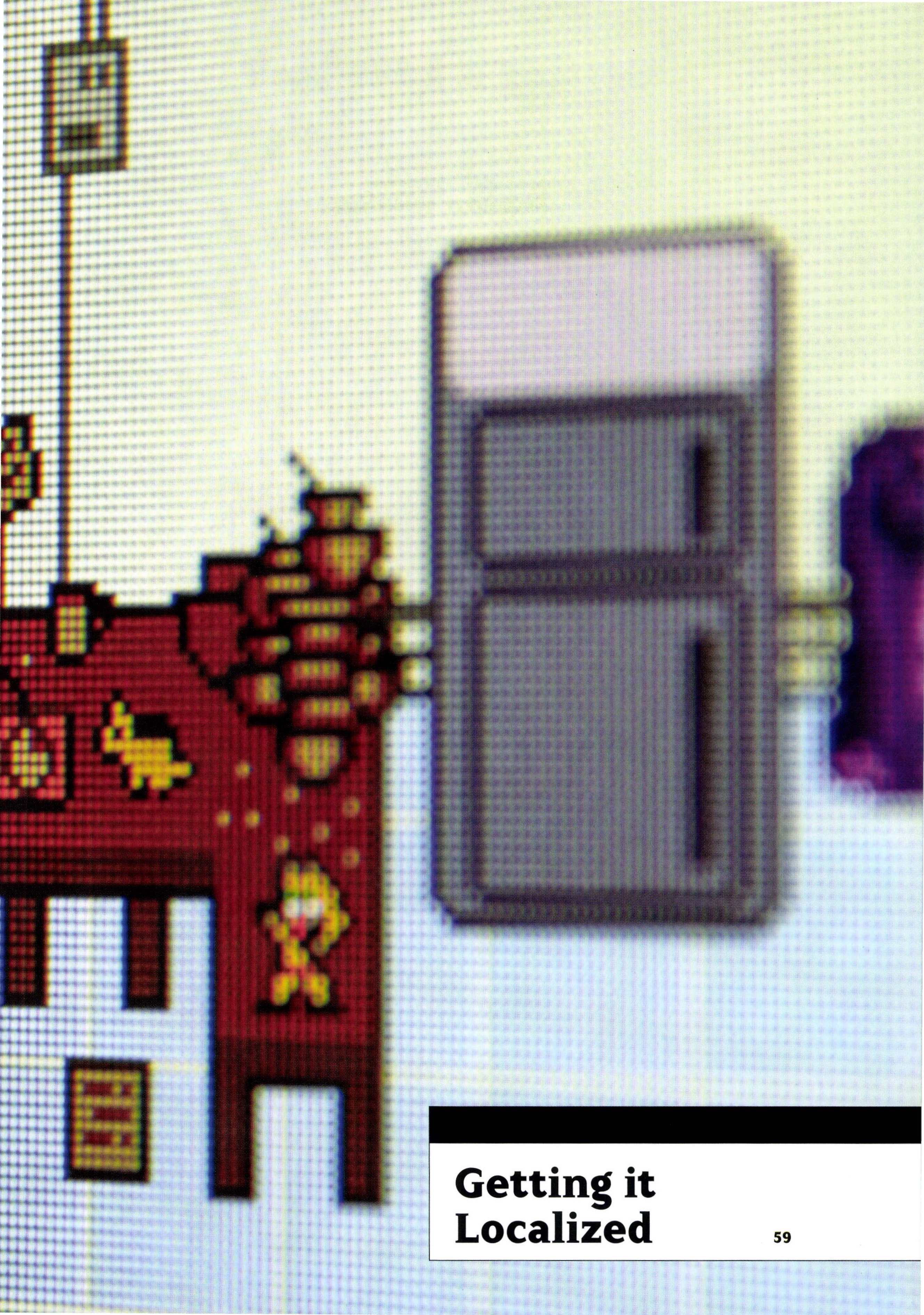
P.S❀ I translated by Google.
I'm sorry if it becomes strange English. DD

Japanese fans sometimes send Toby messages of gratitude in whatever way they can

Undertale is perfect for Japanese fans who love to dress up as their favorite game characters

Some Japanese fans celebrate *Undertale* with food





Getting it Localized

Getting it Localized

Before *Undertale*'s English release, Toby told me that he intended to release the game in Japanese sometime. He faced some big questions, though. How *do* you get a game translated and localized? And how do you ensure the final product is good if you don't even know the language yourself?

In this chapter, we'll briefly look at how game developers approach localization, who Toby hired to localize *Undertale*, and how *Undertale*'s localization process worked on the inside.

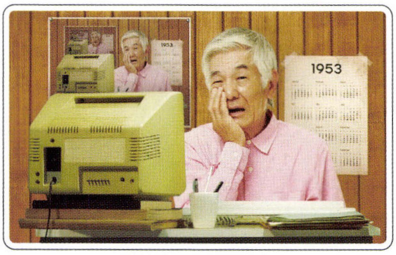
Who to Turn to

Let's say you're just like Toby and have finished developing your own game. It's entirely in English, but you'd like to release it in Japan and other countries too. Where do you even start?

The answer is pretty simple: translation and localization are no different from any other professional service, like plumbing, computer repair, or accounting. If you're a big company, chances are you already have in-house staff members – or possibly an entire department – dedicated to handling such matters. Alternatively, you might already have contracts with outside agencies who can handle everything for you.

But if you're a small company, or just a single person, you'll need to seek outside help. In this situation, your first thought might be, "Do I personally know anyone who can do this for me?" If the answer is no, then then you might ask around for recommendations instead. And if that yields no leads, then there's usually only one choice left: find someone on the Internet.

As a huge video game company, Nintendo has a dedicated department for localization



"Bob Johnson" the single developer *doesn't* have a dedicated localization department

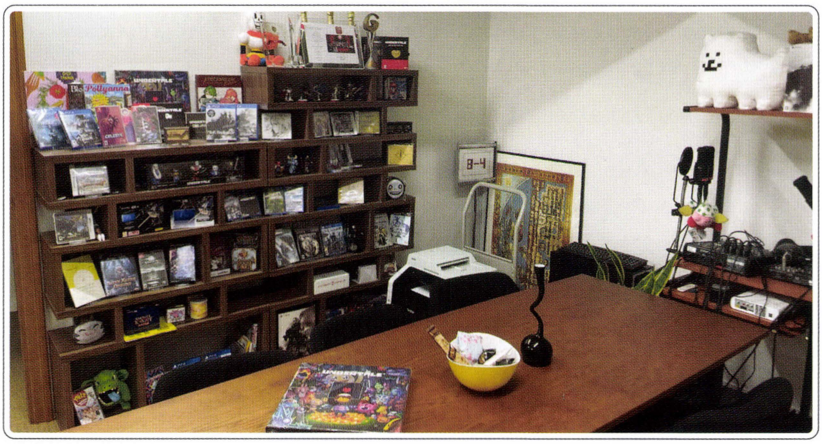
Unfortunately, searching for "hire a translator" or "hire a localizer" online will result in an avalanche of ads, sites, and companies begging for your business. Many of these services will offer to translate business documents, medical patents, video games, underwear packaging, and everything else you can think of.

So, with a million different companies claiming to be experts at every type of translation and localization, how do you know who to pick? In *Undertale*'s case, Toby experienced it all: he asked friends, he looked around online, and he even received unsolicited offers from companies with in-house localization teams.

Enter the Professionals

For months, choice paralysis left Toby unsure of whom to hire. After considering all of his options and recommendations, he decided to hire 8-4, Ltd., a game localization company based in Japan.

Because I'd previously done small jobs for 8-4, I already knew that everyone there loved *Undertale* and that they hoped to see it released in Japan someday. So although I wasn't involved with *Undertale*'s localization at first, I watched as Toby and 8-4 got things rolling in early 2016.



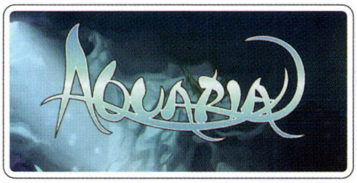
8-4 has a modest little office in the Tokyo area

As a freelancer myself, I've worked with 8-4 a couple times, mostly just translating menu text, tutorial info, etc., plus some light programming work and translation checks

Bringing English Indie Games to Japan

Tokyo-based 8-4, Ltd. was founded in 2005 to fill the growing need for video game localization specialists. Today, 8-4 is known for localizing entries in popular Japanese series into English, including *NieR*, *Monster Hunter*, *Dragon Quest*, *Katamari*, and *Tales*.

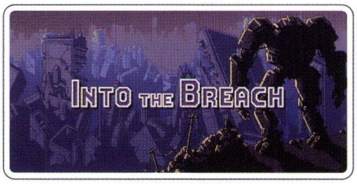
8-4 also specializes in localizing English-language indie games into Japanese. Past works include:



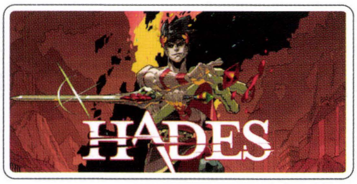
Aquaria (2011)

SHOVEL KNIGHT
ショベルナイト
ショベル オブ ホープ

Shovel Knight (2016)



Into the Breach (2020)



Hades (2021)

Team Building

Not all localization projects are the same – a massive, big-budget game might call for a large team of translators and editors with specialized skill sets, while a small indie game might only warrant a single person juggling multiple responsibilities.

In-house localization departments and industry-specific localization companies usually have more resources at their disposal than generic "one-stop shop" translation agencies. These extra resources allow for larger localization teams filled with qualified specialists. This means that 8-4, as a dedicated game localization company, was able to give *Undertale* the same treatment as a big-budget game from a major studio.

Undertale's localization team consisted of:

- One English-to-Japanese translator who performed all of the raw text translation and localization, as well as the final polishing pass
- A programmer who reprogrammed parts of the game to work properly in Japanese and on game consoles
- Multiple bilingual translators who pointed out translation mistakes and oversights, and made alternative localization suggestions
- Multiple editors who documented text issues and offered feedback for the lead translator to consider implementing during the final polishing phase
- A producer who managed all of these people

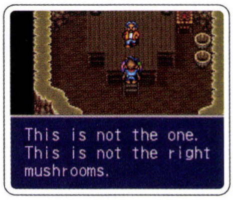
In addition, Toby and 8-4 also pulled in outside help for art asset localization, quality assurance testing, and further language checks. *Undertale*'s Japanese localization was unquestionably a team effort.

Slow and Steady

Normally, the complexity of *Undertale*'s script might've warranted two English-to-Japanese translators in order to achieve a timely release. Instead, 8-4 opted to take it slow and only go with one. This meant the game would take longer and cost more money to localize, but it also brought benefits with it:

- The resulting translation would have a single, consistent voice throughout the game
- The team could take its time to polish everything without rushing
- It reduced the amount of last-minute crunch in general

As the fan translations demonstrated, it would've been feasible to produce a bare-bones Japanese version of *Undertale* in a matter of months. Toby and 8-4 weren't in a rush to push a release out the door, though, so the localization team took its time with the project. In total, eighteen months of work went into *Undertale*'s Japanese release.



This is not the one.
This is not the right
mushrooms.

For reference: *Breath of Fire II*'s localizers were only given a few weeks. *EarthBound*'s localizers took about 10 months

Meet *Undertale*'s Head Translator

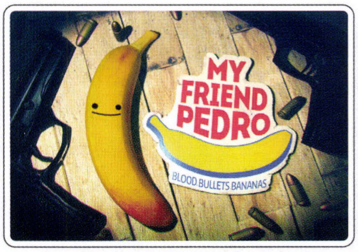
Keiko Fukuichi, a freelance English-to-Japanese translator, specializes in localizing games of every size into Japanese. As a huge fan of *Undertale* herself, she naturally jumped at the chance to localize the game into Japanese. Some of her other professional indie localizations include:

ENTER THE
GUNGEON

Enter the Gungeon (2016)

Return of the
Obra Dinn

Return of the Obra Dinn (2019)


MY
FRIEND
PEDRO
BLOOD BULLETS BANANAS

My Friend Pedro (2019)

Hades (2021)

Toby hangs out with Keiko Fukuichi (head translator) and Brian Gray (localization support staff) in Tokyo during *Undertale*'s localization

Uncommon Help

Because the entertainment localization industry relies so heavily on agencies, middlemen, paperwork, and tight deadlines, creators and localizers are often separated by a wall of bureaucracy. This separation makes it difficult for both sides to communicate with each other. And even when bureaucracy isn't an issue, some creators simply don't care to be involved in the localization process. Either way, it's rare to see a creator actively participate in a localization project.

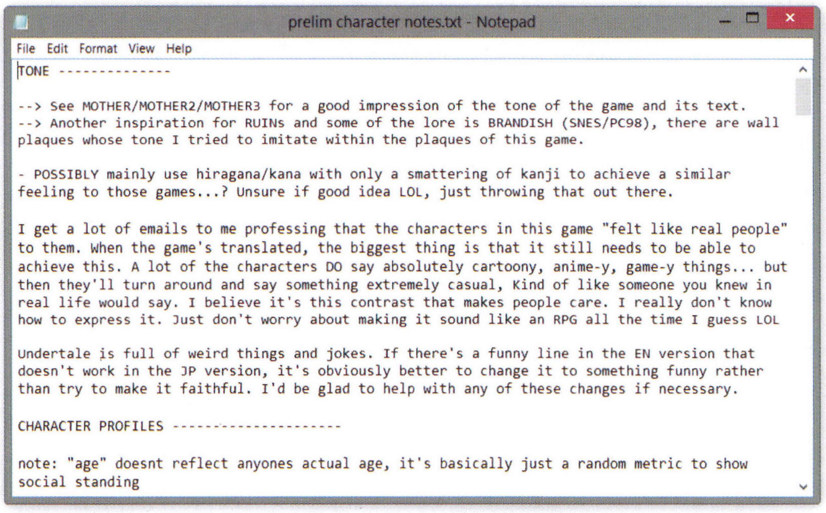
In *Undertale*'s case, Toby was directly involved with the English-to-Japanese localization process from the very start. He provided 8-4 with all of his development files and copious translation notes ahead of time. He remained in constant contact with the team via e-mail, answered question after question, asked question after question, and even met with the localization team in Japan more than once.

Toby chats with John Ricciardi – co-founder of 8-4 and *Undertale*'s localization producer – in Roppongi in 2016

As the localization neared completion, Toby also brought in outside help to critique key parts of the localization and explain their Japanese nuances to him. Toby then sent these critiques to 8-4 to improve the final script before release.

In short, although he's understandably not listed as a member of the localization staff, Toby undeniably played a major part in *Undertale*'s Japanese localization.

On a side note, sometime near the localization's release, Toby mentioned to me that he'd met with the translator at least once before and that they'd discussed localization concerns in person. He later told me that he was genuinely impressed with her work and that she really "got" his style. I was surprised – it's rare for entertainment translators and creators to ever meet at all, much less be on the same wavelength!


prelim character notes.txt - Notepad
File Edit Format View Help

TONE --------------

--> See MOTHER/MOTHER2/MOTHER3 for a good impression of the tone of the game and its text.
--> Another inspiration for RUINs and some of the lore is BRANDISH (SNES/PC98), there are wall plaques whose tone I tried to imitate within the plaques of this game.

- POSSIBLY mainly use hiragana/kana with only a smattering of kanji to achieve a similar feeling to those games...? Unsure if good idea LOL, just throwing that out there.

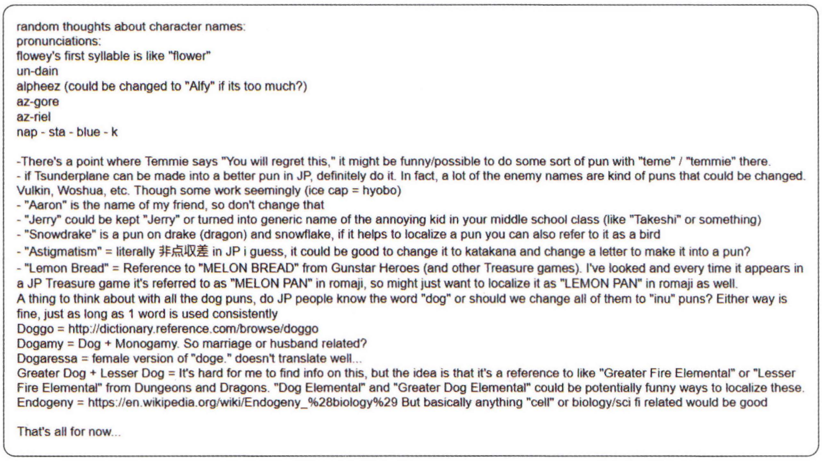
I get a lot of emails to me professing that the characters in this game "felt like real people" to them. When the game's translated, the biggest thing is that it still needs to be able to achieve this. A lot of the characters DO say absolutely cartoony, anime-y, game-y things... but then they'll turn around and say something extremely casual, Kind of like someone you knew in real life would say. I believe it's this contrast that makes people care. I really don't know how to express it. Just don't worry about making it sound like an RPG all the time I guess LOL

Undertale is full of weird things and jokes. If there's a funny line in the EN version that doesn't work in the JP version, it's obviously better to change it to something funny rather than try to make it faithful. I'd be glad to help with any of these changes if necessary.

CHARACTER PROFILES --------------------

note: "age" doesnt reflect anyones actual age, it's basically just a random metric to show social standing

Before the translation had even begun, Toby provided lots of detailed notes and potential localization ideas

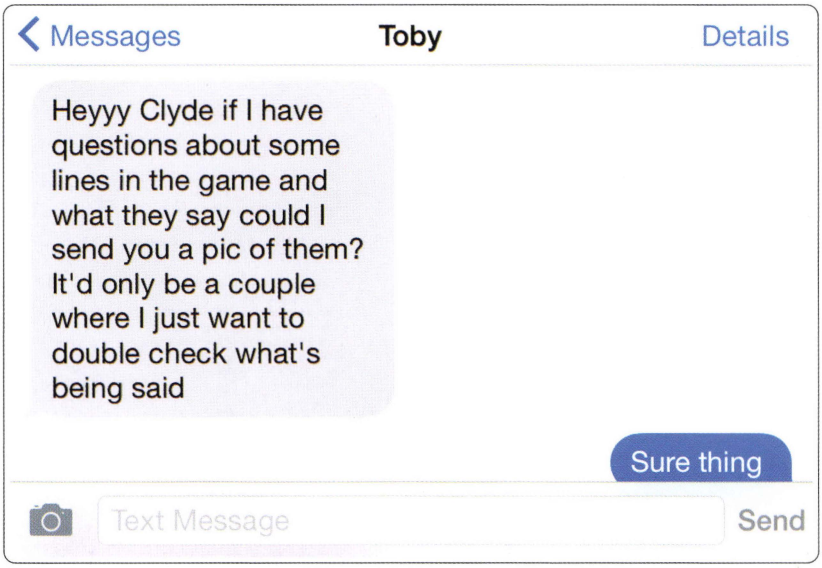


random thoughts about character names:
pronunciations:
flowey's first syllable is like "flower"
un-dain
alpheez (could be changed to "Alfy" if its too much?)
az-gore
az-riel
nap - sta - blue - k

-There's a point where Temmie says "You will regret this," it might be funny/possible to do some sort of pun with "teme" / "temmie" there.
- if Tsunderplane can be made into a better pun in JP, definitely do it. In fact, a lot of the enemy names are kind of puns that could be changed. Vulkin, Woshua, etc. Though some work seemingly (ice cap = hyobo)
- "Aaron" is the name of my friend, so don't change that
- "Jerry" could be kept "Jerry" or turned into generic name of the annoying kid in your middle school class (like "Takeshi" or something)
- "Snowdrake" is a pun on drake (dragon) and snowflake, if it helps to localize a pun you can also refer to it as a bird
- "Astigmatism" = literally 非点収差 in JP i guess, it could be good to change it to katakana and change a letter to make it into a pun?
- "Lemon Bread" = Reference to "MELON BREAD" from Gunstar Heroes (and other Treasure games). I've looked and every time it appears in a JP Treasure game it's referred to as "MELON PAN" in romaji, so might just want to localize it as "LEMON PAN" in romaji as well.
A thing to think about with all the dog puns, do JP people know the word "dog" or should we change all of them to "inu" puns? Either way is fine, just as long as 1 word is used consistently
Doggo = http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/doggo
Dogamy = Dog + Monogamy. So marriage or husband related?
Dogaressa = female version of "doge." doesn't translate well...
Greater Dog + Lesser Dog = It's hard for me to find info on this, but the idea is that it's a reference to like "Greater Fire Elemental" or "Lesser Fire Elemental" from Dungeons and Dragons. "Dog Elemental" and "Greater Dog Elemental" could be potentially funny ways to localize these.
Endogeny = https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endogeny_%28biology%29 But basically anything "cell" or biology/sci fi related would be good

That's all for now...

Toby and the localization staff constantly e-mailed each other back and forth about in-game details, specific localization choices, and feedback



Heyyy Clyde if I have questions about some lines in the game and what they say could I send you a pic of them? It'd only be a couple where I just want to double check what's being said

Sure thing

Toby sought outside help to ensure that the Japanese text faithfully captured his intentions

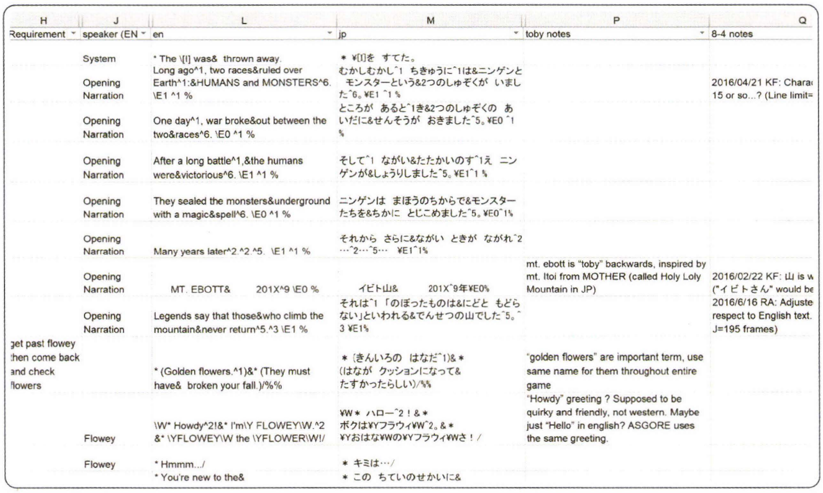
Work Overview

Undertale's localization process consisted of three main parts: localizing the text, localizing the art, and reprogramming the game.

Text Work

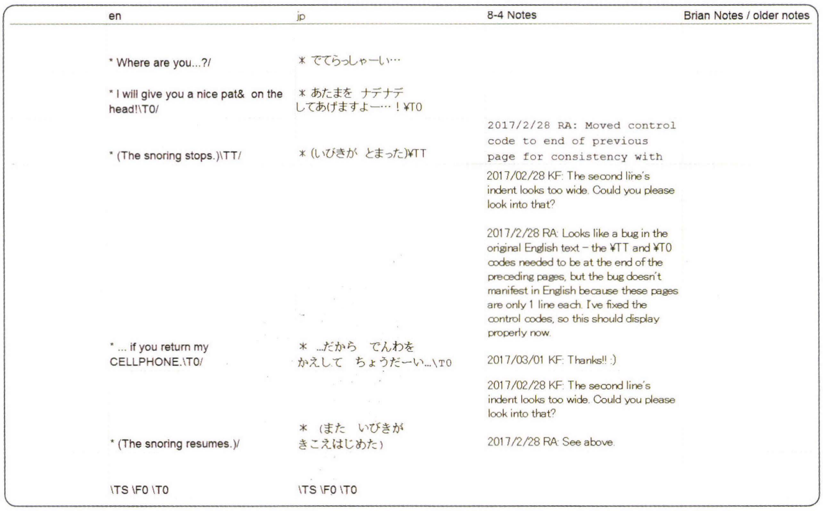
Undertale's initial translation began in February 2016, and the first draft was completed eight weeks later. This first draft underwent many edits and fixes over the following months, and was continually adjusted before the game's release in August 2017.

Undertale's text localization was done via spreadsheet, which is standard for most professional game localizations. *Undertale*'s spreadsheets contained all of the original English text, explanatory notes from Toby, notes from the translator, notes from the editors, supplementary and technical information, and more. These spreadsheets are brimming with inside information, some of which we'll examine throughout this book.



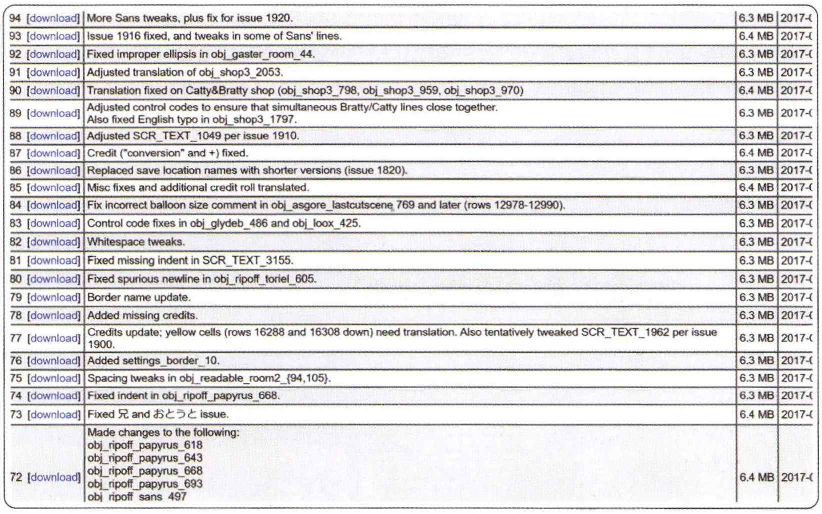
H	J	L	M	P	Q
Requirement	speaker (EN	en	jp	toby notes	8-4 notes
	System	* The \[I] was& thrown away.	＊ ¥[I]を　すてた。		
	Opening Narration	Long ago^1, two races&ruled over Earth^1:&HUMANS and MONSTERS^6. \E1 ^1 %	むかしむかし^1　ちきゅうに^1は&ニンゲンと　モンスターという&2つのしゅぞくが　いました^6。¥E1 ^1 %		2016/04/21 KF: Chara 15 or so...? (Line limit=
	Opening Narration	One day^1, war broke&out between the two&races^6. \E0 ^1 %	ところが　あると^1き&2つのしゅぞくの　あいだに&せんそうが　おきました^5。¥E0 ^1 %		
	Opening Narration	After a long battle^1,&the humans were&victorious^6. \E1 ^1 %	そして^1　ながい&たたかいのす^1え　ニンゲンが&しょうりしました^5。¥E1^1 %		
	Opening Narration	They sealed the monsters&underground with a magic&spell^6. \E0 ^1 %	ニンゲンは　まほうのちからで&モンスターたちを&ちかに　とじこめました^5。¥E0^1%		
	Opening Narration	Many years later^2.^2.^5. \E1 ^1 %	それから　さらに&ながい　ときが　ながれ^2…^2…^5…　¥E1^1%		
	Opening Narration	MT. EBOTT&　　201X^9 \E0 %	イビト山&　　201X^9年¥E0%	mt. ebott is "toby" backwards, inspired by mt. Itoi from MOTHER (called Holy Loly Mountain in JP)	2016/02/22 KF: 山 is w ("イビトさん" would be
	Opening Narration	Legends say that those&who climb the mountain&never return^5.^3 \E1 %	それは^1「のぼったものは&にどと　もどらない」といわれる&でんせつの山でした^5。^3 ¥E1%		2016/6/16 RA: Adjuste respect to English text. J=195 frames)
et past flowey hen come back and check flowers		* (Golden flowers.^1)&* (They must have& broken your fall.)/%%	＊（きんいろの　はなだ^1)&＊(はなが　クッションになって&たすかったらしい)/%%	"golden flowers" are important term, use same name for them throughout entire game	
	Flowey	\W* Howdy^2!&* I'm\Y FLOWEY\W.^2&* \YFLOWEY\W the \YFLOWER\W!/	¥W＊ ハロー^2！&＊ボクは¥Yフラウィ¥W^2。&＊¥Yおはな¥Wの¥Yフラウィ¥Wさ！/	"Howdy" greeting ? Supposed to be quirky and friendly, not western. Maybe just "Hello" in english? ASGORE uses the same greeting.	
	Flowey	* Hmmm.../ * You're new to the&	＊ キミは…/ ＊ この　ちていのせかいに&		

Spreadsheets like this are what translators stare at day after day – luckily, Toby provided lots of notes ahead of time to ensure the localization stayed close to his original intentions



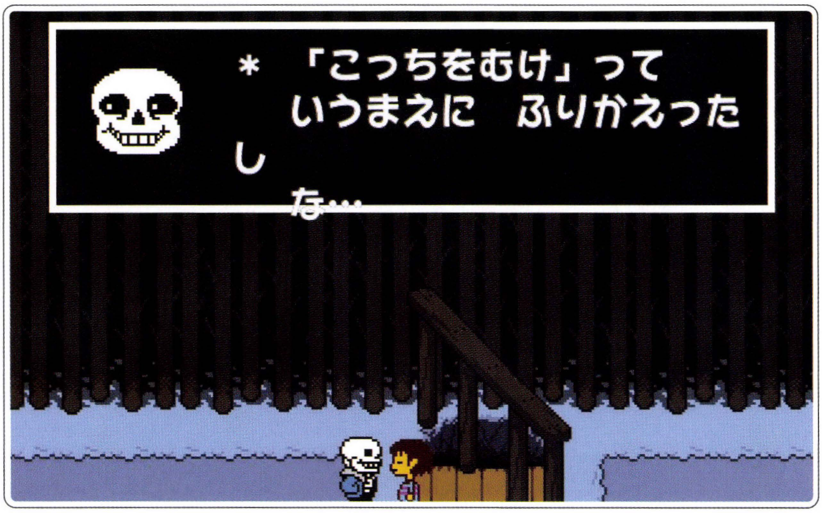
en	jp	8-4 Notes	Brian Notes / older notes
* Where are you...?/	＊ でてらっしゃーい…		
* I will give you a nice pat& on the head!\T0/	＊ あたまを　ナデナデしてあげますよー…！¥T0		
* (The snoring stops.)\TT/	＊ (いびきが　とまった)¥TT	2017/2/28 RA: Moved control code to end of previous page for consistency with	
		2017/02/28 KF: The second line's indent looks too wide. Could you please look into that? 2017/2/28 RA: Looks like a bug in the original English text – the ¥TT and ¥T0 codes needed to be at the end of the preceding pages, but the bug doesn't manifest in English because these pages are only 1 line each. I've fixed the control codes, so this should display properly now.	
* ... if you return my CELLPHONE.\T0/	＊ …だから　でんわをかえして　ちょうだーい…\T0	2017/03/01 KF: Thanks!! :)	
		2017/02/28 KF: The second line's indent looks too wide. Could you please look into that?	
* (The snoring resumes.)/	＊ (また　いびきがきこえはじめた)	2017/2/28 RA: See above.	
\TS \F0 \T0	\TS \F0 \T0		

8-4's team used these spreadsheets to fine-tune localization choices, technical issues, and implementation details

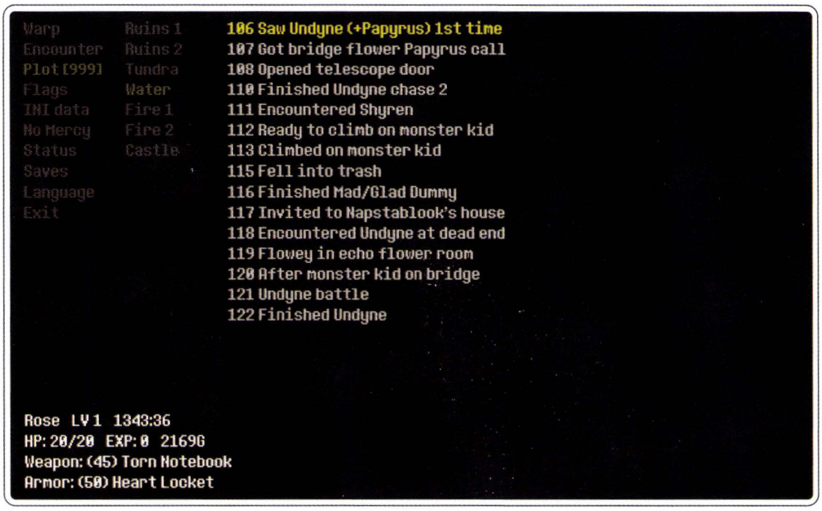


94 [download]	More Sans tweaks, plus fix for issue 1920.	6.3 MB	2017-
93 [download]	Issue 1916 fixed, and tweaks in some of Sans' lines.	6.4 MB	2017-
92 [download]	Fixed improper ellipsis in obj_gaster_room_44.	6.3 MB	2017-
91 [download]	Adjusted translation of obj_shop3_2053.	6.3 MB	2017-
90 [download]	Translation fixed on Catty&Bratty shop (obj_shop3_798, obj_shop3_959, obj_shop3_970)	6.4 MB	2017-
89 [download]	Adjusted control codes to ensure that simultaneous Bratty/Catty lines close together. Also fixed English typo in obj_shop3_1797.	6.3 MB	2017-
88 [download]	Adjusted SCR_TEXT_1049 per issue 1910.	6.3 MB	2017-
87 [download]	Credit ("conversion" and +) fixed.	6.4 MB	2017-
86 [download]	Replaced save location names with shorter versions (issue 1820).	6.3 MB	2017-
85 [download]	Misc fixes and additional credit roll translated.	6.4 MB	2017-
84 [download]	Fix incorrect balloon size comment in obj_asgore_lastcutscene 769 and later (rows 12978-12990).	6.3 MB	2017-
83 [download]	Control code fixes in obj_glydeb_486 and obj_loox_425.	6.3 MB	2017-
82 [download]	Whitespace tweaks.	6.3 MB	2017-
81 [download]	Fixed missing indent in SCR_TEXT_3155.	6.3 MB	2017-
80 [download]	Fixed spurious newline in obj_ripoff_toriel_605.	6.3 MB	2017-
79 [download]	Border name update.	6.3 MB	2017-
78 [download]	Added missing credits.	6.3 MB	2017-
77 [download]	Credits update; yellow cells (rows 16288 and 16308 down) need translation. Also tentatively tweaked SCR_TEXT_1962 per issue 1900.	6.3 MB	2017-
76 [download]	Added settings_border_10.	6.3 MB	2017-
75 [download]	Spacing tweaks in obj_readable_room2_{94,105}.	6.3 MB	2017-
74 [download]	Fixed indent in obj_ripoff_papyrus_668.	6.3 MB	2017-
73 [download]	Fixed 兄 and おとうと issue.	6.4 MB	2017-
72 [download]	Made changes to the following: obj_ripoff_papyrus_618 obj_ripoff_papyrus_643 obj_ripoff_papyrus_668 obj_ripoff_papyrus_693 obj_ripoff_sans_497	6.4 MB	2017-

Documenting the translation process for this book was exhausting – I had to wade through hundreds of spreadsheets by the end!



Because *Undertale* wasn't originally designed with Japanese fonts, font styles, and text directions in mind, text-formatting issues had to be hunted down and fixed



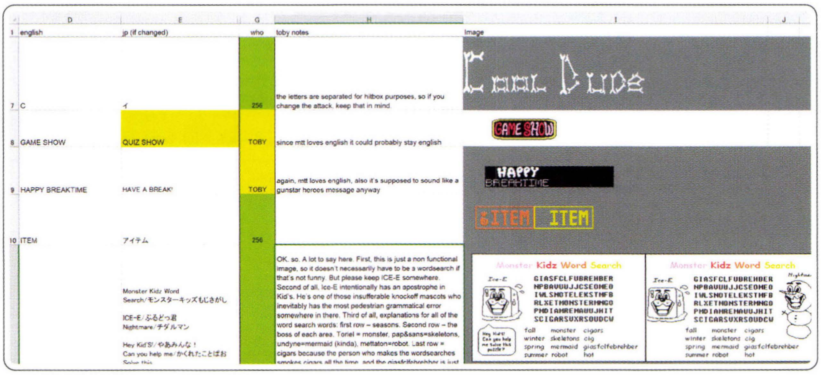
```
Warp         Ruins 1    106 Saw Undyne (+Papyrus) 1st time
Encounter    Ruins 2    107 Got bridge flower Papyrus call
Plot [999]   Tundra     108 Opened telescope door
Flags        Water      110 Finished Undyne chase 2
INI data     Fire 1     111 Encountered Shyren
No Mercy     Fire 2     112 Ready to climb on monster kid
Status       Castle     113 Climbed on monster kid
Saves                   115 Fell into trash
Language                116 Finished Mad/Glad Dummy
Exit                    117 Invited to Napstablook's house
                        118 Encountered Undyne at dead end
                        119 Flowey in echo flower room
                        120 After monster kid on bridge
                        121 Undyne battle
                        122 Finished Undyne



Rose  LV 1  1343:36
HP: 20/20  EXP: 0  2169G
Weapon: (45) Torn Notebook
Armor: (50) Heart Locket
```

8-4 developed its own debug tools that let the localization team jump to any point in the game and immediately see new text changes in action

Illustration Work

Translators usually work with ordinary text that can be typed into a computer. But when it comes to games, anime, and other forms of entertainment, visual displays also need to be properly translated. *Undertale* was no exception – dozens of images and animations needed to be redrawn for the Japanese release.

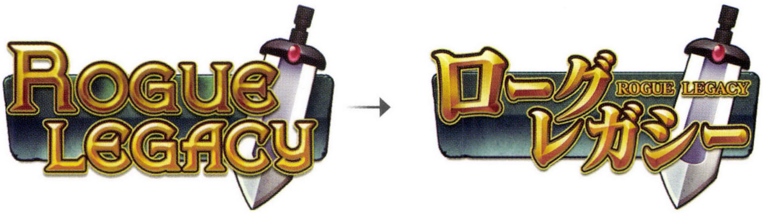
The localization process also included spreadsheets of graphical assets that needed translating, complete with notes from Toby and 8-4



	D	E	G	H	I
1	english	jp (if changed)	who	toby notes	Image
7	C	イ	256	the letters are separated for hitbox purposes, so if you change the attack, keep that in mind	
8	GAME SHOW	QUIZ SHOW	TOBY	since mtt loves english it could probably stay english	
9	HAPPY BREAKTIME	HAVE A BREAK!	TOBY	again, mtt loves english, also it's supposed to sound like a gunstar heroes message anyway	
10	ITEM	アイテム	256		
		Monster Kidz Word Search/モンスターキッズもじさがし ICE-E/ぶるどっ君 Nightmare/チダルマン Hey Kid'S!/やあみんな！ Can you help me/かくれたことばお Solve this		OK. so. A lot to say here. First, this is just a non functional image, so it doesn't necessarily have to be a wordsearch if that's not funny. But please keep ICE-E somewhere. Second of all, Ice-E intentionally has an apostrophe in Kid's. He's one of those insufferable knockoff mascots who inevitably has the most pedestrian grammatical error somewhere in there. Third of all, explanations for all of the word search words: first row – seasons. Second row – the boss of each area. Toriel = monster, pap&sans=skeletons, undyne=mermaid (kinda), mettaton=robot. Last row = cigars because the person who makes the wordsearches smokes cigars all the time, and the giasfclfebrehber is just	

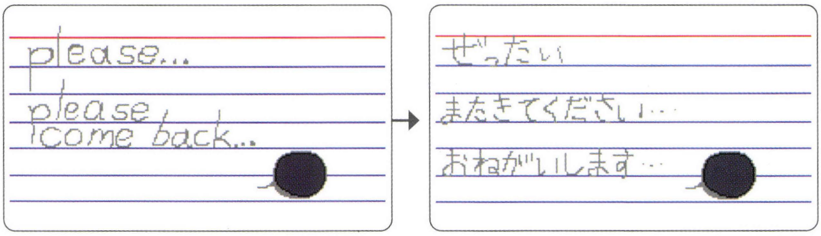
Image translation adds a new dimension to the localization process – after all, professional translators aren't necessarily professional artists. With this in mind, 8-4 teamed up with Toby and 256graph, a Japanese studio that specializes in pixel art, to localize the English text images into Japanese.

8-4 regularly hires the professional artists at 256graph to redraw images into Japanese, such as this *Rogue Legacy* logo

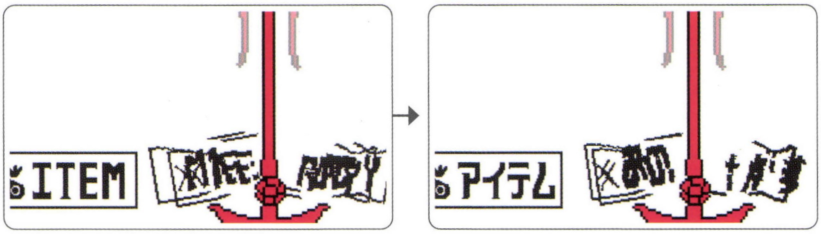


Undertale's minimalist art style allowed Toby and 8-4 to redraw some art assets into Japanese without difficulty. Most of the remaining images and animations fell to the pros at 256graph.

256graph handled most of *Undertale*'s Japanese image changes, but simple ones like this were handled in-house at 8-4



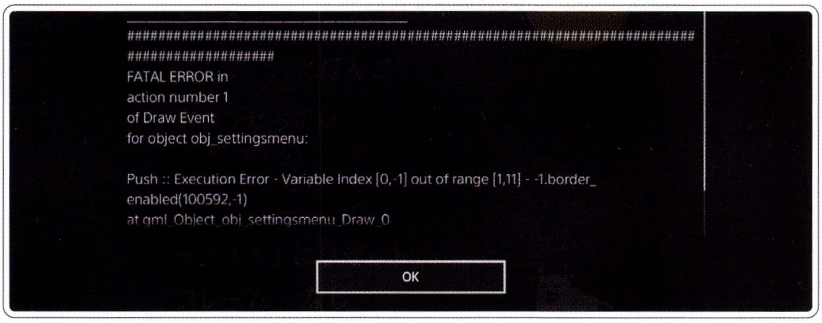
256graph was also responsible for redrawing English text animations into Japanese, such as this "MERCY" box that shatters



Technical Work

For a number of reasons, the technical side of *Undertale*'s Japanese release took far longer than the text translation itself.

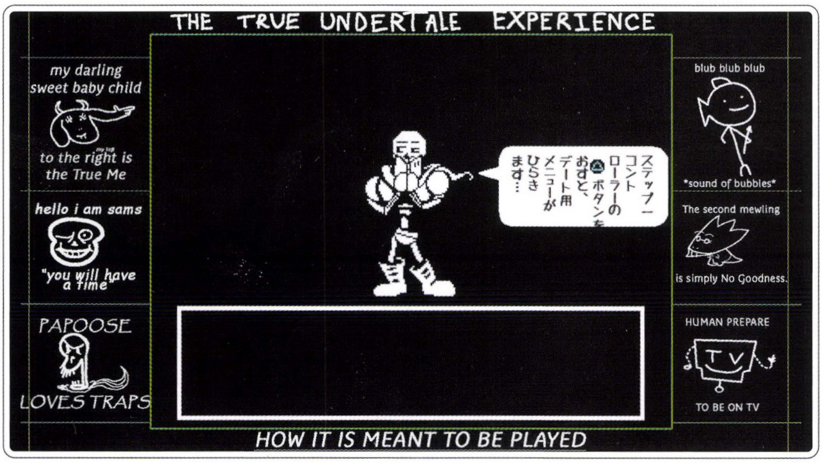
8-4's first challenge was to get the English version of *Undertale* running on Sony's PlayStation 4 and Vita systems. Toby had originally developed *Undertale* with home computers in mind, so getting the game to run smoothly on these cutting-edge gaming systems took months of work between multiple parties.



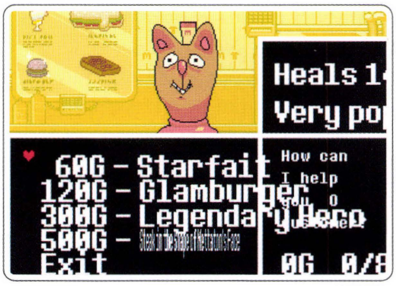
```
##########################################################################
####################
FATAL ERROR in
action number 1
of Draw Event
for object obj_settingsmenu:

Push :: Execution Error - Variable Index [0,-1] out of range [1,11] - -1.border_
enabled(100592,-1)
at gml_Object_obj_settingsmenu_Draw_0
```

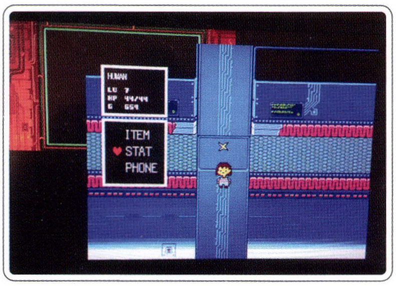
A huge part of *Undertale*'s localization process was simply getting *Game Maker* stuff to run properly on current game consoles

8-4's programmer faced other technical challenges too. The game had to be reprogrammed to work with the new Japanese text. Further work was needed to allow the English and Japanese data to coexist inside the same game. And, of course, all of these changes resulted in countless new bugs that needed to be found and squashed.


THE TRUE UNDERTALE EXPERIENCE
my darling sweet baby child
to the right is the True Me
hello i am sams
"you will have a time"
PAPOOSE LOVES TRAPS
ステップーコントローラーの△ボタンをおすと、デート用メニューがひらきます…
blub blub blub
sound of bubbles
The second mewling
is simply No Goodness.
HUMAN PREPARE
TV
TO BE ON TV
HOW IT IS MEANT TO BE PLAYED

Early builds of the Japanese localization included this goofy background border by Everdraed for testing purposes


Heals 1
Very po
How can I help
60G - Starfait
120G - Glamburger
300G - Legendary Hero
500G - Steak in the Shape of Mettaton's Face
Exit
0G 0/8


HUMAN
LV 7
HP 44/44
G 659
ITEM
STAT
PHONE

LEFT: An amusing font-related bug appears during testing

RIGHT: The number of technical issues increased when Sony released the PlayStation 4 Pro halfway through *Undertale*'s localization

Beyond Localization

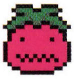
So far, we've seen how games like *Undertale* get localized, but localization is only one step toward publishing a game in a different region. In fact, there are many other steps that are easy to overlook, including:

- Getting the game through the target region's ratings board and other certification processes
- Getting the game into the target region's physical and digital storefronts
- Localizing secondary materials like printed manuals, digital manuals, achievements, and bonus materials
- Promoting the game in the target region
- Getting the game included in special events in the target region
- Maintaining a website in the target language
- Providing customer support in the target region
- Dealing with banks, taxes, contracts, and other business matters in the target region

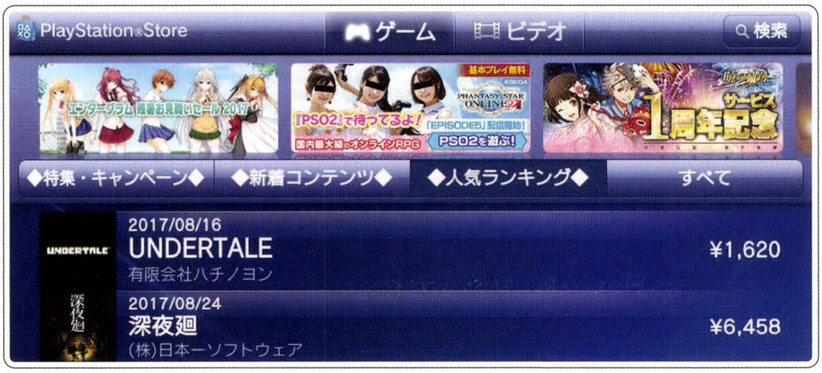
Of course, not every game needs everything listed above. Still, without working knowledge of the target language, industry contacts in the target region, and a business presence in the target region, most of these "afterthoughts" of the localization process can be nightmarish to navigate.

Luckily, Toby didn't have to worry about these things too much. As an experienced Japanese game publisher, 8-4 was able to provide all of the above and more for *Undertale*. 8-4 also connected Toby with Japanese media outlets, and even served as his personal translator/interpreter as needed.

All in all, it's clear that the staff members at 8-4 didn't see *Undertale* as a simple one-and-done, make-a-quick-buck translation job. Instead, everyone involved was committed to making it a mainstream success in Japan. They ensured the game was given a proper, professional Japanese localization, made it accessible to a much wider Japanese audience than before, and supported the game even after its release, all while collaborating with the game's creator. Without a doubt, *Undertale* received the game localization industry's red carpet treatment.



I fully realize that my personal connections with 8-4 and Toby might make everything in this chapter – and maybe this entire book – sound like one big, happy advertisement, but that isn't my intention. No one's perfect, and no translation or localization is perfect. At the very least, I hope this chapter offers some new insight into the practical side of entertainment localization that isn't widely known.



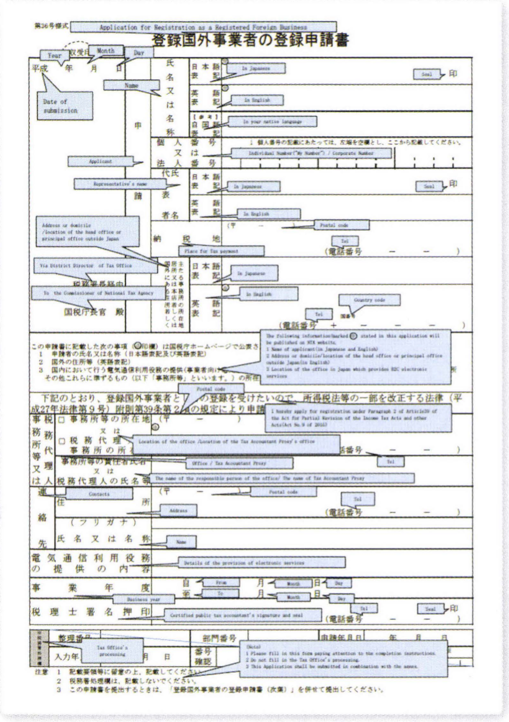
2017/08/16
UNDERTALE
有限会社ハチノヨン
¥1,620

2017/08/24
深夜廻
(株)日本一ソフトウェア
¥6,458

Even after your game is translated, other language-intensive tasks await, such as getting your game onto foreign storefronts

PS4
UNDERTALE™
CERO
B
12才以上対象
8-4

Different countries have different rating systems that require payments, paperwork, and back-and-forth correspondence


第36号様式 Application for Registration as a Registered Foreign Business

登録国外事業者の登録申請書

Year 年 Month 月 Day 日

平成 年 月 日

Date of submission

Name

氏名又は名称

日本語表記 In Japanese Seal 印

英語表記 In English

【参考】自国語表記 In your native language

Applicant

申請者

個人番号又は法人番号 Individual Number ("My Number") / Corporate Number

代表者氏名

Representative's name

日本語表記 In Japanese Seal 印

英語表記 In English

納税地 Place for Tax payment (〒 －) Postal code (電話番号 － －) Tel

Address or domicile /location of the head office or principal office outside Japan

国外の住所若しくは居所又は本店若しくは主たる事務所の所在地

日本語表記 In Japanese

英語表記 In English

(電話番号 ＋ － － －) Tel Country code 国番号

Via District Director of Tax Office

税務署長経由

To the Commissioner of National Tax Agency

国税庁長官 殿

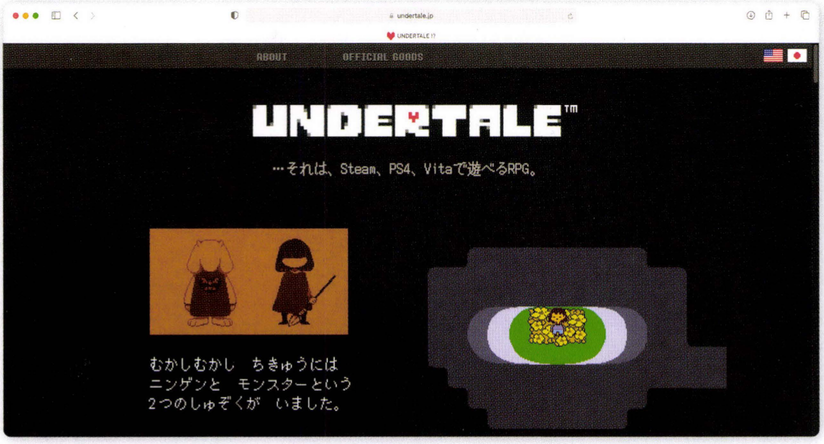
この申請書に記載した次の事項（◎印欄）は国税庁ホームページで公表されます。
1 申請者の氏名又は名称（日本語表記及び英語表記）
2 国外の住所等（英語表記）
3 国内において行う電気通信利用役務の提供（事業者向け…）…その他これらに準ずるもの（以下「事務所等」といいます。）の所在…

The following information(marked ◎) stated in this application will be published on NTA website.
1 Name of applicant(in Japanese and English)
2 Address or domicile/location of the head office or principal office outside Japan(in English)
3 Location of the office in Japan which provides B2C electronic services

下記のとおり、登録国外事業者としての登録を受けたいので、所得税法等の一部を改正する法律（平成27年法律第９号）附則第39条第２項の規定により申請します。

I hereby apply for registration under Paragraph 2 of Article39 of the Act for Partial Revision of the Income Tax Acts and other Acts(Act No.9 of 2015)

Nothing's as fun as doing paperwork and filing your taxes in a language you don't speak!



…それは、Steam、PS4、Vitaで遊べるRPG。

むかしむかし ちきゅうには
ニンゲンと モンスターという
2つのしゅぞくが いました。

It might be helpful to have a translated website for your translated game, and/or offer support for paying customers who have questions or problems

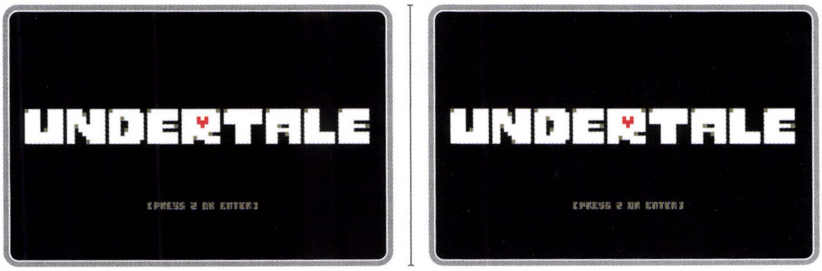
Starting the Game

Starting the Game

BREAKING NEWS: Human Intruder Enters Underground

Undertale begins with a history lesson: humans and monsters fought in a great war long ago. The humans won, and permanently sealed the monsters beneath a mountain. Much later, a lone human climbs the mountain and accidentally falls into the monsters' underground world...

To Translate or Not to Translate



"WTF?! I paid for a translation, not a leave-it-the-same-ation!"

Undertale's title has two official English spellings, according to Toby: "Undertale" and "UNDERTALE". But what about in Japanese? Surprisingly, the answer is basically the same: just "UNDERTALE".

At first, it might seem odd for a Japanese game translation to leave an English title untranslated – after all, shouldn't a translation actually, you know, translate things? If anything should get translated, it should at least be the title, right?

The choice to leave *Undertale*'s name in English was intentional – it's quite common for English words to remain unchanged in English-to-Japanese video game translations. There are two main reasons for this: English already plays a major role in Japanese culture, and English has been a part of Japanese video games since video games were invented. In other words, Japanese gamers are accustomed to a certain amount of English in games.

Naturally, from an outsider's perspective – and from a paying client's perspective – leaving text untranslated might seem like the mark of a shoddy translator. But when translating a game from English into Japanese, it can actually be the mark of an experienced translator.

Interestingly, the unofficial Japanese spelling of "Undertale" appears online more often than the official spelling

✕ アンダーテール ○ アンダーテイル

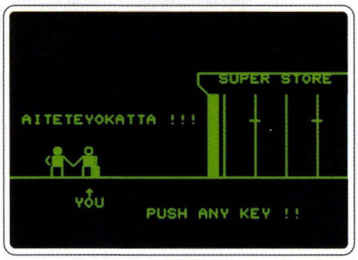
When *Undertale*'s title *must* be written in Japanese for whatever reason, the official Japanese spelling is アンダーテイル ("*andāteiru*"). Prior to the official Japanese release, fans used the slightly different spelling of アンダーテール ("*andāteru*"). The game's new, official spelling was one of many ways in which the official Japanese release initially seemed "off" to early fans.

English in Japanese Games

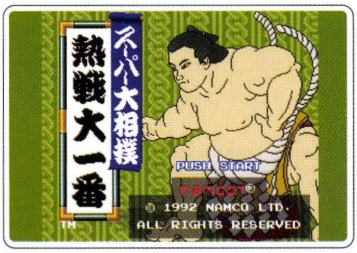
English plays a huge part in modern Japanese culture: the Japanese language is filled with English words, English is a mandatory subject in schools, and English has permeated the Japanese entertainment industry for decades. In short, English in Japanese video games is completely normal – and even expected to some degree.

COLOR TV-GAME 15
MODEL CTG-15V
カラー テレビゲーム15
MODEL CTG-15V

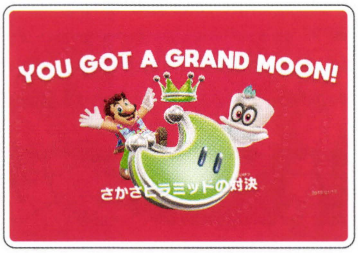
Nintendo Color TV-Game 15 (1977)


SUPER STORE
AITETEYOKATTA !!!
YOU
PUSH ANY KEY !!

Manbiki Shōnen (1982)


熱戦大一番
スーパー大相撲
PUSH START
namcot
© 1992 NAMCO LTD.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
TM

Super Ōzumo (1992)

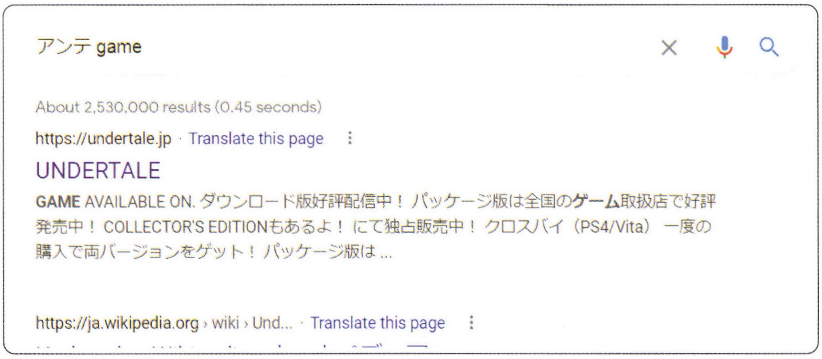

YOU GOT A GRAND MOON!
さかさピラミッドの対決

Super Mario Odyssey (2017)

For Short

It's common for popular games in Japan to receive unofficial, abbreviated names. For example, *Super Mario Bros.* is often shortened to "SuMari", and *Dragon Quest* is often called "DraQue".

Undertale has its own Japanese abbreviation too: アンテ (*an te*, "UnTa"). Fortunately, this abbreviation works with both the official and unofficial translations!



アンテ game

About 2,530,000 results (0.45 seconds)

https://undertale.jp · Translate this page

UNDERTALE

GAME AVAILABLE ON. ダウンロード版好評配信中！ パッケージ版は全国の**ゲーム**取扱店で好評発売中！ COLLECTOR'S EDITIONもあるよ！ にて独占販売中！ クロスバイ（PS4/Vita） 一度の購入で両バージョンをゲット！ パッケージ版は ...

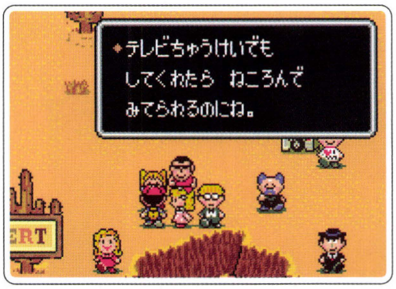
https://ja.wikipedia.org › wiki › Und... · Translate this page

You might be happy to hear that *Luigi's Mansion* is abbreviated as "LuiMan" and that *Super Mario Bros. 2* (the Birdo one) is sometimes just called "USA" when fans are talking about games in the series

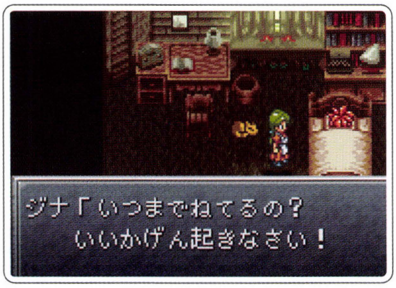
Putting it in Writing

The Japanese language has three different writing systems: *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *kanji*. In standard written Japanese, these three systems work together to convey information. There are approximately 50 *hiragana* characters, 50 *katakana* characters, and 2000 standard *kanji* characters.

Many video games in the 1990s and earlier used a simplified form of Japanese that can be considered "retro" today


◆テレビちゅうけいでも
してくれたら　ねころんで
みてられるのにね。

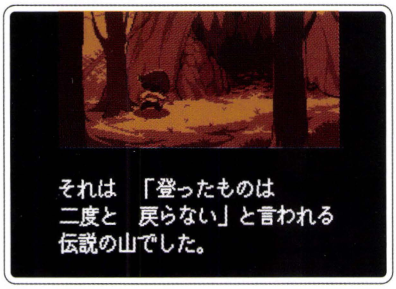
MOTHER 2 (1994)


ジナ「いつまでねてるの？
いいかげん起きなさい！

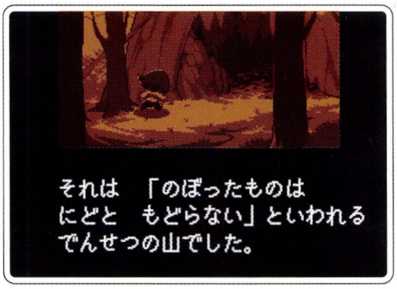
Chrono Trigger (1995)

During the 1990s and earlier, hardware limitations made it unwieldy to support the thousands of *kanji* characters. This led developers to rely more heavily on *hiragana* and *katakana*, with limited *kanji* support when possible. All three writing systems are commonly supported in modern games, which in turn gives the "mostly *hiragana* and *katakana*" writing style a strong retro vibe.

These two screenshots (left one is a mock-up) say the exact same thing, but the modern style has several complicated characters while the retro style is simpler and curvier overall


それは　「登ったものは
二度と　戻らない」と言われる
伝説の山でした。

Modern Style (used for signs, etc.)
Mixes *katakana*, *hiragana* and *kanji*


それは　「のぼったものは
にどと　もどらない」といわれる
でんせつの山でした。

Retro Style (used for dialogue, etc.)
Mostly uses *hiragana* and *katakana* only

Because Toby designed *Undertale* as a love letter to retro Japanese RPGs, he asked 8-4 to mimic the retro style of classic Japanese games, particularly when characters speak. For this reason, the Japanese dialogue in *Undertale* uses this simplified writing style, while inanimate objects like plaques and signs use the more standard writing style.

Although this simplified Japanese style has a retro feel to it, the lack of *kanji* also lends it an immature or "grade schooler" vibe. This combination led some fans to criticize the official translation as feeling too "kiddie" and/or old-fashioned.

There were mixed opinions on the choice to use retro, simplified Japanese. Some fans simply said it was difficult to read. Louder fans scoffed and threw insults around. Others praised the choice by saying it made characters feel more "alive", or that it made the text feel "gentle".

The Japanese Language's Many Writing Systems

The Japanese language uses three different writing systems: *hiragana, katakana,* and *kanji.*

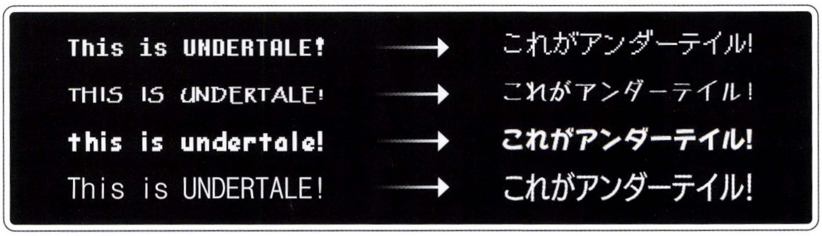
Hiragana and *katakana* are both syllabaries, which means every character is one syllable. You can write any and every Japanese word with *hiragana* or *katakana* alone. *Kanji* is a more complicated writing system that Japan imported from China long ago. *Kanji* is complex, follows multiple pronunciation rules, contains thousands of characters, and takes years to master. All three systems are used side-by-side in normal, everyday Japanese writing.

Early Japanese games could only support *hiragana* and/or *katakana,* but *kanji* became available as game hardware improved. Toby and 8-4 intentionally avoided heavy *kanji* usage in *Undertale*'s dialogue to retain the game's intended "retro" vibe.

Individual Character Examples

Hiragana	Katakana	Kanji
ろ	ロ	露
Pronunciation: *ro*	**Pronunciation:** *ro*	**Pronunciation:** *ro, rō, ru, tsuyu, akira, arawa*
Meaning: nothing specific	**Meaning:** nothing specific	**Meanings:** dew, tears, transience, expose, Russia

Just the Right Type



This is UNDERTALE! → これがアンダーテイル!

THIS IS UNDERTALE! → これがアンダーテイル！

this is undertale! → これがアンダーテイル!

This is UNDERTALE! → これがアンダーテイル!

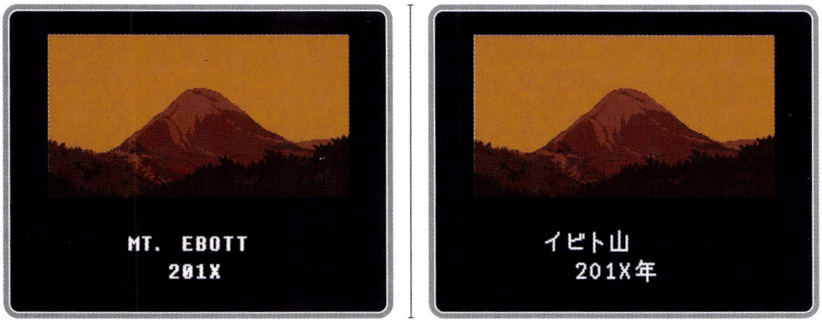
In text-heavy games, fonts can shape the way a game "feels" just as much as its art and sound (note: for display purposes, the *Undertale* fonts here aren't to scale)

Fonts are a big part of the *Undertale* experience – the game makes heavy use of multiple fonts, and it even contains font-related jokes. What's more, Toby chose many of the game's English fonts because they're generic, cheesy, and not what a serious, professional game developer would ever use.

Because fonts are so important in *Undertale,* Toby and 8-4 searched at length for Japanese fonts that "feel" like their English counterparts, even if they aren't visually similar. In other words, cheesy English fonts were replaced with cheesy Japanese fonts, generic English game fonts were replaced with generic Japanese fonts, and so on.

There were two reasons for the team's obsession with finding the right Japanese fonts: a poor font choice would inaccurately represent the original game, and a poor font choice would sour the player's experience.

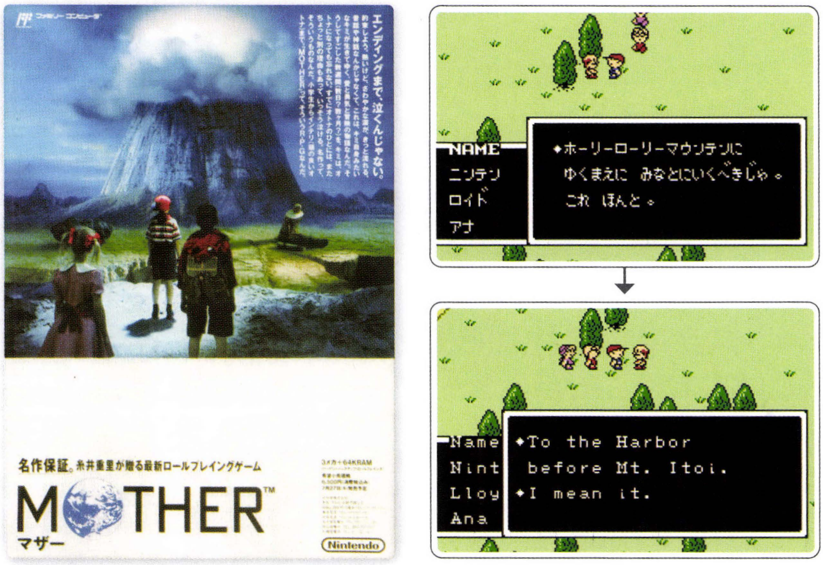
Sound of the Mountain



It was interesting – and frustrating – to see the official localization criticized for "mistranslating" this mountain's name

Undertale begins when the main character visits a mountain known as "Mt. Ebott". It's not obvious at first glance, but this isn't some random name – it's simply "Toby" backwards, spelled in a roundabout way.

This naming choice was inspired by a similar mountain in *EarthBound Beginnings* known as "Mt. Itoi", which is a reference to Shigesato Itoi, the game's creator. In the original Japanese version of *EarthBound Beginnings*, however, this mountain was known as "Holy Loly Mountain". This difference meant that Toby's homage to the *EarthBound* series was destined to be lost in translation.


エンディングまで、泣くんじゃない。
名作保証。糸井重里が贈る最新ロールプレイングゲーム
MOTHER
マザー
Nintendo
NAME
ニンテン
ロイド
アナ
Name
Nint
Lloy
Ana

◆ホーリーローリーマウンテンに
ゆくまえに みなとにいくべきじゃ。
これ ほんと。

◆To the Harbor
before Mt. Itoi.
◆I mean it.

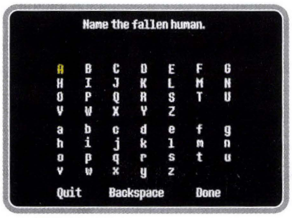
Mt. Itoi – known as Holy Loly Mountain in Japanese – is a frightful, deadly place full of monsters and darkness, so it's no wonder it served as inspiration for Mt. Ebott

Even though Toby's reference to Mt. Itoi would be lost on Japanese players, the reference to Toby's name could still be conveyed in translation. To make the reference work, the translator took the name トビイ (*to bi i*, "Toby"), reversed the characters, and called the mountain "Mt. Ibito".

By changing the mountain's name, the translator was able to preserve Toby's original intent as closely as possible. However, the change from "Ebott" to "Ibito" also meant that most Japanese players would know the mountain by a different name than the rest of the world.

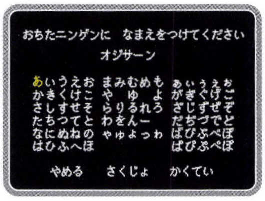
The Naming Game

Before starting, the player must name the main character. In the English version of *Undertale*, only uppercase and lowercase letters are available:


Name the fallen human.
A B C D E F G
H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U
V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g
h i j k l m n
o p q r s t u
v w x y z
Quit
Backspace
Done

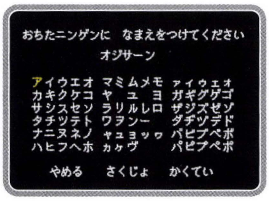
The English version of *Undertale* understandably only lets you use English letters to name yourself

For the Japanese release, 8-4 modified the naming screen to add support for three character sets: *hiragana*, *katakana*, and the English alphabet. Adding these extra character sets required new programming, a new layout design, and a way to switch between each set:


おちたニンゲンに　なまえをつけてください

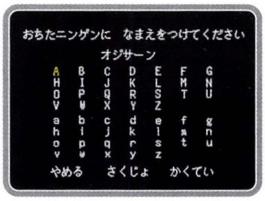
オジサーン
あいうえお まみむめも ぁぃぅぇぉ
かきくけこ や ゆ よ がぎぐげご
さしすせそ らりるれろ ざじずぜぞ
たちつてと わをんー だぢづでど
なにぬねの ゃゅょっゎ ばびぶべぼ
はひふへほ ぱぴぷぺぽ
やめる
さくじょ
かくてい

Japanese *hiragana*


おちたニンゲンに　なまえをつけてください

オジサーン
アイウエオ マミムメモ ァィゥェォ
カキクケコ ヤ ユ ヨ ガギグゲゴ
サシスセソ ラリルレロ ザジズゼゾ
タチツテト ワヲンー ダヂヅデド
ナニヌネノ ャュョッヮ バビブベボ
ハヒフヘホ ヵヶヴ パピプペポ
やめる
さくじょ
かくてい

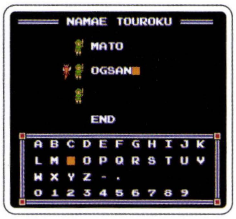
Japanese *katakana*


おちたニンゲンに　なまえをつけてください

オジサーン
A B C D E F G
H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U
V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g
h i j k l m n
o p q r s t u
v w x y z
やめる
さくじょ
かくてい

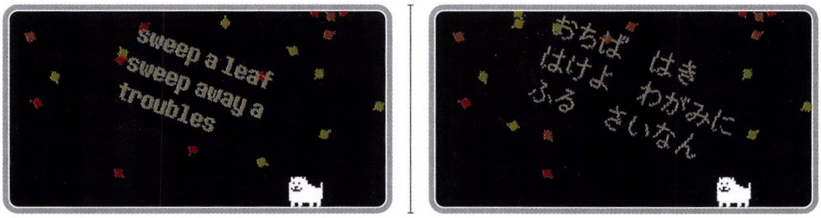
English alphabet

Incidentally, it wasn't actually necessary to change the naming screen for the Japanese release. For technical, historical, and linguistic reasons, English-only naming screens are quite common in Japanese games. But because this naming screen is one of the first player interactions in *Undertale*, 8-4's team put the extra work into improving the user interface.


NAMAE TOUROKU
MATO
OGSAN
END
A B C D E F G H I J K
L M O P Q R S T U V
W X Y Z - .
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Japanese games have long included English-only naming screens

Japanese Dog Poetry

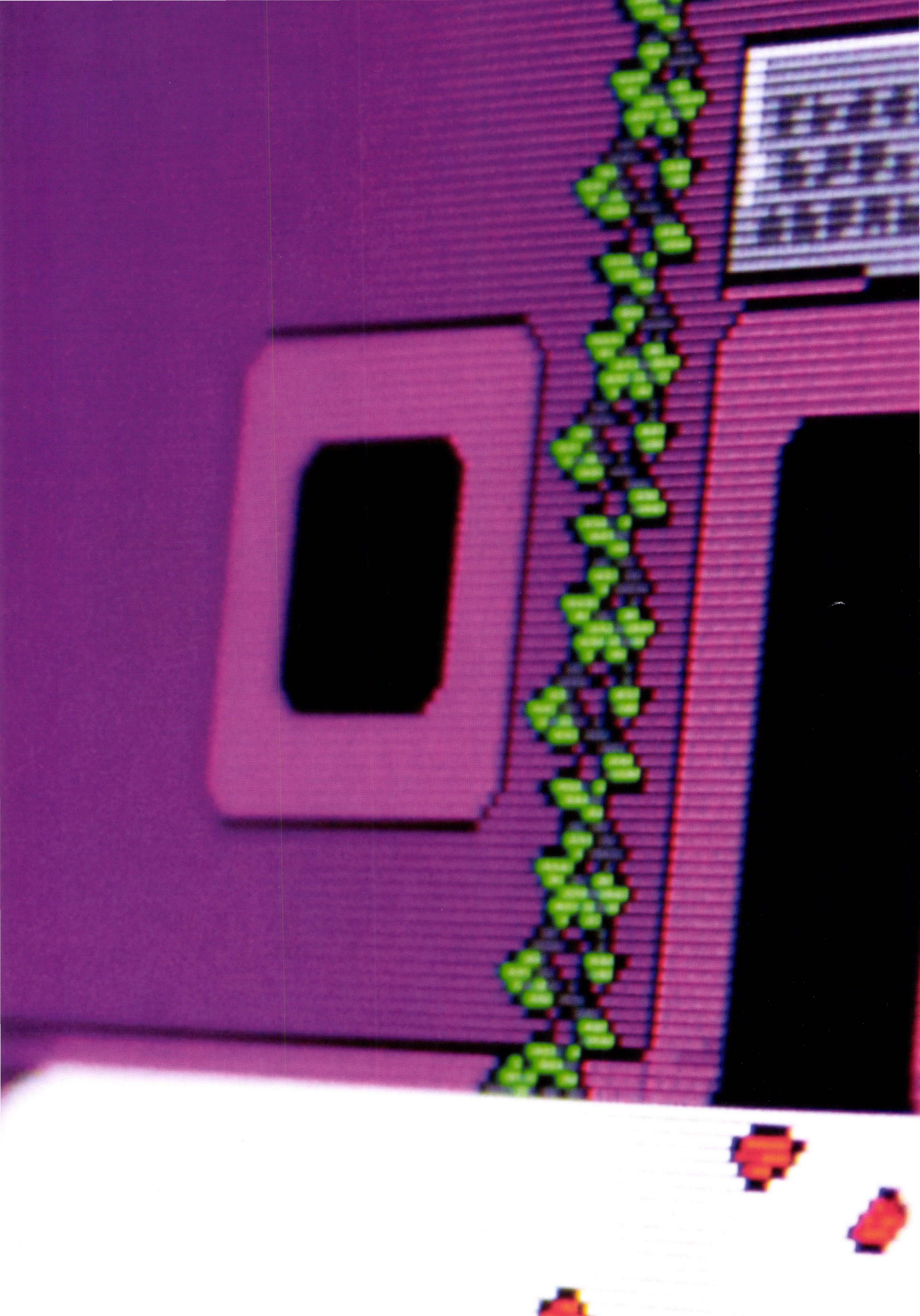

sweep a leaf
sweep away a
troubles

おちば　はき
はけよ　わがみに
ふる　さいなん

Reader Challenge #1: Read the dog's English text out loud, in a dog voice, but in a way that gives it a 5-7-5 syllable haiku pattern!

Undertale's option menu contains things you'd expect: screen size options, language options, controller options, and more. But the option menu also features a unique theme and text quote for each season of the year.

In English, these seasonal quotes feel like short, silly sentences and mini-poems. With that in mind, the translator localized the quotes as funny haiku poems while retaining the meaning of the original English quotes. Because haiku poems traditionally include references to seasons and nature, this localization choice turned out to be a natural fit for the Japanese release.



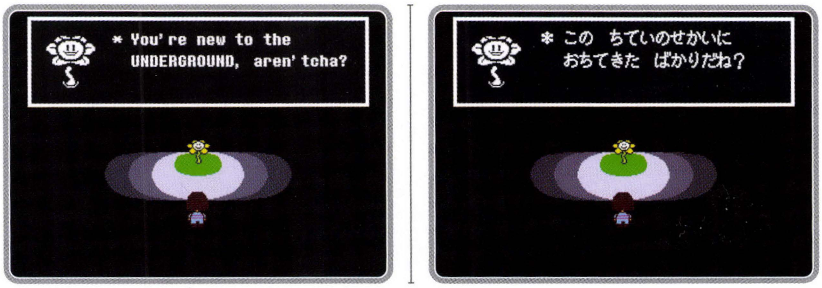
Ruins

Ruins

Human Intruder Encounters Monsters

After falling down a hole on Mt. Ebott, the main character wakes up near some strange underground ruins. Curious sights and sounds abound at every turn.

Under Where



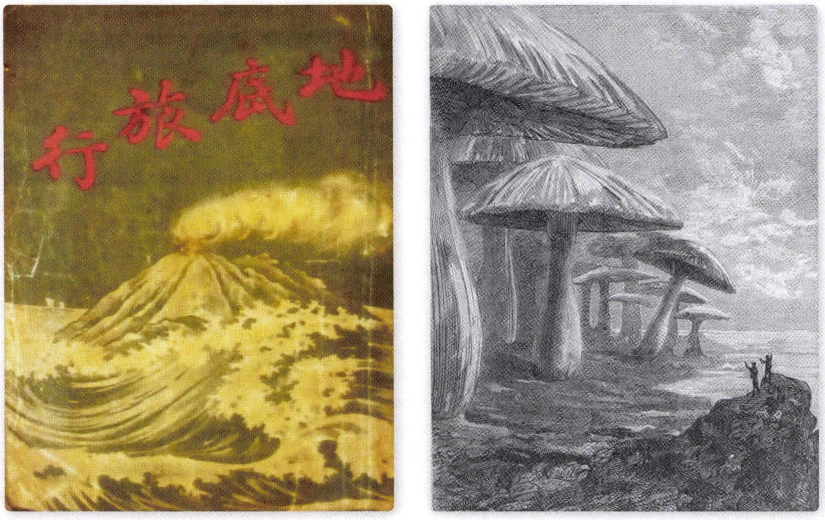
* You're new to the UNDERGROUND, aren'tcha?

＊この ちていのせかいに
おちてきた ばかりだね？

This first scene in the game sets the tone for everything else to come, so it was important to get everything just right in translation

Undertale takes place in a massive area that exists beneath Mt. Ebott. In English, this area is called the "Underground".

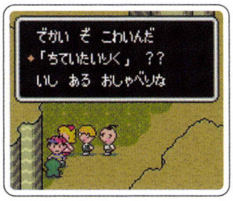
The Japanese language has multiple words that can mean "underground", each with its own unique nuances. In *Undertale*'s case, the localization team decided to translate "Underground" as *chitei* ("depths of the earth") and *chitei no sekai* ("world at the depths of the earth") as needed. In fiction, *chitei* tends to evoke the feeling of a vast underground land or realm of unseen wonders:



LEFT: The plot of "Journey to the Center of the Earth" (called "*Chitei Journey*" in Japanese) involves going inside a big volcanic mountain

RIGHT: The word *chitei* evokes images of a fantastical underground world

On a side note, the decision to use *chitei* in the Japanese name resulted in a minor coincidence: the vast underground world in *EarthBound* was originally known in Japanese as the *chitei tairiku* ("continent at the depths of the earth"). Given Toby's fondness for *EarthBound* and *EarthBound*'s clear influence on *Undertale* as a whole, it almost feels like this translation choice was meant to be from the very start.



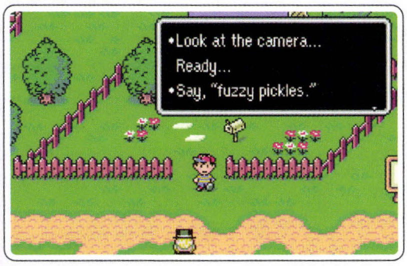
でかい そ これんだ
◆「ちていたいりく」 ??
いし ある おしゃべりな

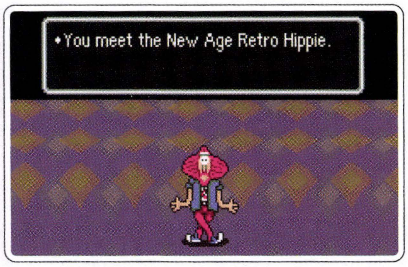
Does *Undertale* actually take place in *EarthBound*'s Lost Underworld? I asked Toby and he just said "lol"

Inspiration Spotlight: *EarthBound*

Only For Nintendo
EARTHBOUND™
BONUS INSIDE
FREE PLAYERS GUIDE
EARTHBOUND
KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
SUPER NINTENDO
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

MOTHER™
2
ギーグの逆襲
Nintendo
スーパーファミコン
SHVC-MB
ロールプレイング
バッテリーバックアップ

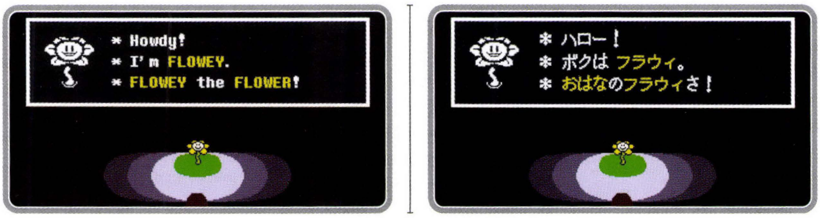

•Look at the camera...
Ready...
•Say, "fuzzy pickles."


•You meet the New Age Retro Hippie.

In 1994, Nintendo released a Super Famicom role-playing game known as *MOTHER 2* in Japan. The game sold hundreds of thousands of copies and was a hit among fans and critics alike.

Hoping for similar success outside of Japan, Nintendo localized *MOTHER 2* into English and released the game as *EarthBound* in 1995. The game sold poorly and was quickly moved to bargain bins. Despite its commercial failure, *EarthBound* eventually became a cult classic that continues to influence game developers around the world.

Flowey Speaks



* Howdy!
* I'm FLOWEY.
* FLOWEY the FLOWER!

* ハロー！
* ボクは フラウィ。
* おはなのフラウィさ！

Flowey's name remained "Flowey" in Japanese, partly because the English word "flower" is well known in Japan

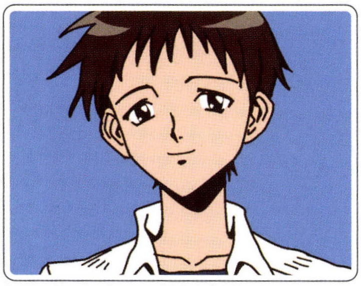
The main character encounters a happy monster named Flowey. In English, Flowey uses friendly, welcoming words like "howdy", "golly", and "aren'tcha". But looks and words are deceiving – Flowey is actually sadistic and evil.

In Japanese, Flowey begins by speaking in a friendly way that sounds fitting for a happy flower character. He also uses the Japanese personal pronoun *boku*, which gives off a friendly, boyish vibe. Even after Flowey reveals his cruel, sinister side and switches to a rude Japanese speaking style, he continues to use the lighthearted *boku* pronoun. This early localization choice makes sense after the player learns Flowey's true identity much later on.

Japanese Personal Pronouns: *boku*

Boku is an informal, masculine Japanese pronoun for "I/me". *Boku* carries a sense of boyish-ness, gentleness, timidness, decency, and/or being spoiled, among other things. Other fictional characters who use *boku* include:

Ness
(*MOTHER 2/EarthBound*)



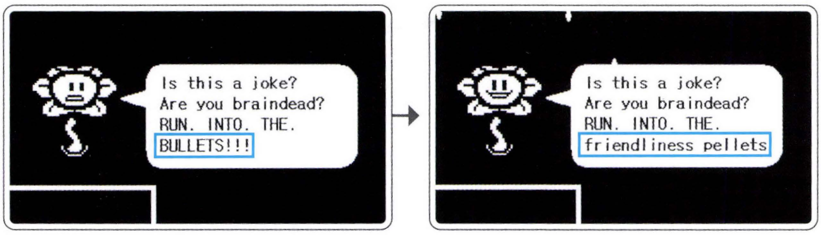
Shinji Ikari
(*Neon Genesis Evangelion* series)

SpongeBob
(*SpongeBob SquarePants*)

Naruhodo Ryūichi (aka Phoenix Wright,
Gyakuten Saiban/Ace Attorney series)

Technical Teamwork

Flowey pretends to be friendly and helpful at first, but it becomes clear that he only wants to murder the main character.



Is this a joke?
Are you braindead?
RUN. INTO. THE.
BULLETS!!!

Is this a joke?
Are you braindead?
RUN. INTO. THE.
friendliness pellets

The fact that this scene is literally one minute into the game is amazing – I can't think of any Japanese RPGs that are so bold right off the bat

As part of his battle system tutorial, Flowey instructs the player to catch little white "friendliness pellets", which are actually harmful projectiles. If the player dodges them, Flowey responds in English with:

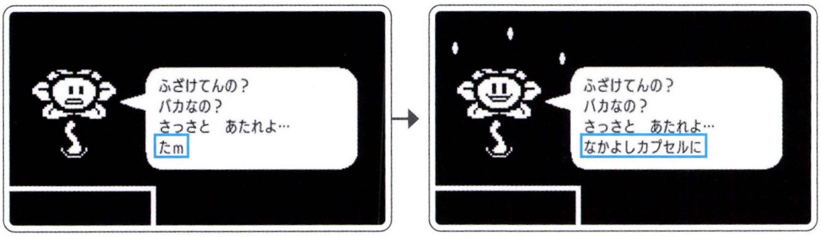
> *Is this a joke? Are you brain dead? RUN. INTO. THE. BULLETS!!!*

Flowey then pauses, notices he used the word "bullets" in his text bubble, and quickly changes it to say "friendliness pellets" instead.

Flowey's line is easily translated into Japanese, but there were two problems:

1. The line's comedic timing was designed for the English text
2. The changed word needed to appear last to look correct

The first problem required back-and-forth testing with the localization programmer to get the timing right. The resulting Japanese scene has Flowey notice the mistake before the word *tama* ("bullet") fully displays. Because the word isn't fully spelled, the letter "m" is left dangling at the end, which is what happens after typing "t a m" with a Japanese keyboard. For Japanese players, this joke conveys a similar sense of "whoops, that's not the word I meant to use".



ふざけてんの？
バカなの？
さっさと　あたれよ…
たm

ふざけてんの？
バカなの？
さっさと　あたれよ…
なかよしカプセルに

Incidentally, the term "friendliness pellets" was localized as "friendliness capsules" after much internal discussion

The second problem required some creative writing, because standard Japanese grammar would usually place the word "bullets" somewhere in the middle of the sentence and not necessarily at the end.

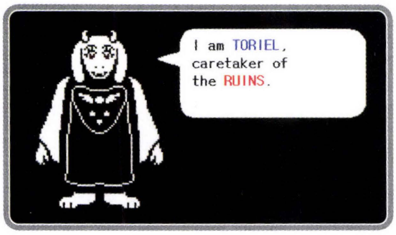
With these new adjustments in place, the final Japanese line became:

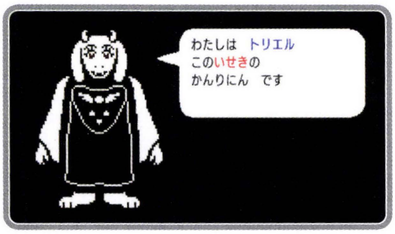
> *Are you joking around? Are you an idiot? Just get hit already! By the bul--*

This wasn't the only line that involved timing, of course – the localizers encountered many more that required this level of attentive teamwork.

Toriel Speaks

Random trivia: Toby pointed out in his notes that the name of this place, "RUINS", is a reference to *Brandish*


I am TORIEL, caretaker of the RUINS.


わたしは トリエル
このいせきの
かんりにん です

A kind monster saves the main character from Flowey. This character serves as a guide through the dangerous ruins, further explains how *Undertale*'s battle system works, and offers the main character a new home in the Underground.

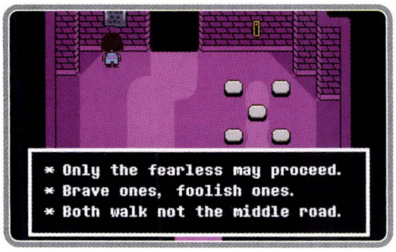
In English, this character is named "Toriel", a play on the word "tutorial". Fortunately, because the English word "tutorial" is already a part of the Japanese language, there was no need to localize Toriel's name into something else.

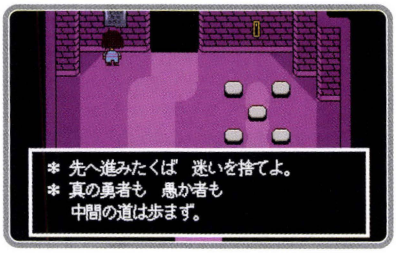
In English, Toriel speaks with a polite, motherly tone. In Japanese, she uses an equivalent speaking style that conveys politeness and gentleness. She also uses the personal pronoun *watashi*, which portrays her as a polite, caring woman.

Although nobody intended it, I like how Toriel's name contains the Japanese word *torie* ("virtue; merit; redeeming feature"). Toriel teaches the player how to be a good person in *Undertale*, so it's a nice, fitting coincidence.

Walk This Way

Note how the Japanese text here is more complicated looking than Japanese dialogue in other screenshots – that's because it uses *kanji* much more heavily


* Only the fearless may proceed.
* Brave ones, foolish ones.
* Both walk not the middle road.


* 先へ進みたくば 迷いを捨てよ。
* 真の勇者も 愚か者も
中間の道は歩まず。

The first sign in the game offers a hint to a nearby puzzle:

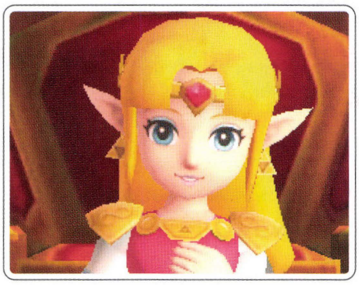
> *Only the fearless may proceed. Brave ones. Foolish ones. Both walk not the middle road.*

While working on this line, the translator noticed that it could also be interpreted as a subtle hint about the three different ways of playing *Undertale*: a difficult path that leads to a happy ending, a murderous path that leads to a bad ending, and a "middle of the road" path that leads to a mediocre ending.

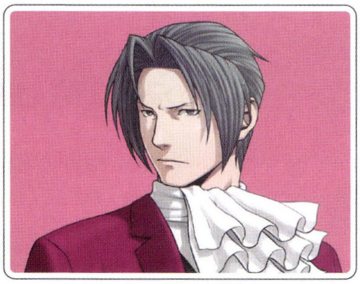
Although Toby didn't comment on this line's potential double-meaning, it so strongly parallels the literal meaning of the hint that both meanings can be inferred from the Japanese line too.

Japanese Personal Pronouns: *watashi*

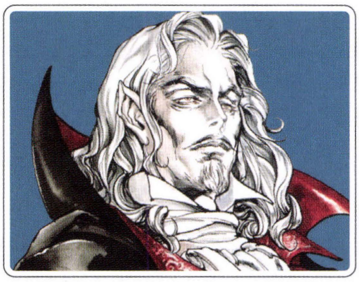
Watashi is the most neutral version of "I/me" in Japanese. In formal situations, *watashi* can be used by almost anyone. In informal situations, *watashi* is a tad more feminine. Other fictional characters who use *watashi* include:



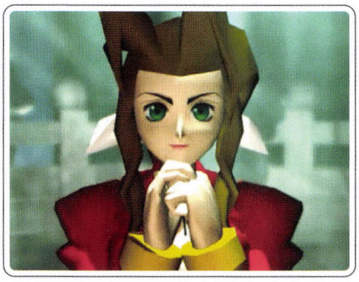
Princess Zelda
(*The Legend of Zelda* series)



Mitsurugi Reiji (aka Miles Edgeworth,
Gyakuten Saiban/Ace Attorney series)

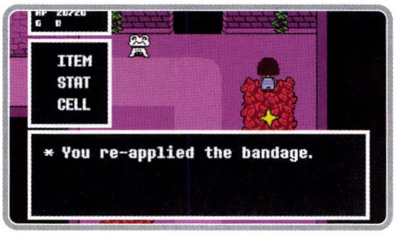


Dracula
(*Akumajō/Castlevania* series)

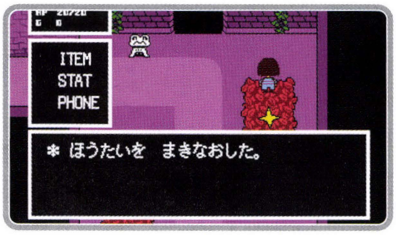


Aerith Gainsborough
(*Final Fantasy* series)

Bandage Care



* You re-applied the bandage.



* ほうたいを まきなおした。

On an unrelated note, I have a gut feeling that the more experienced a translator is, the weirder their total search history is

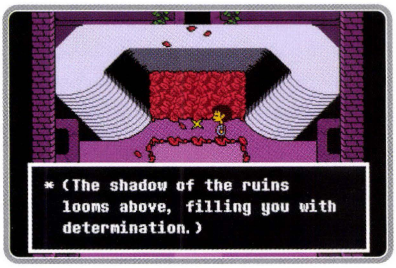
The main character starts with the "Bandage" item. In English, "bandage" can refer to either an adhesive bandage or a bandage wrap. This ambiguity was intentional, but late-game text suggests "bandage wrap" was intended.

In Japanese, however, these two types of bandages go by different names: *bansōkō* ("adhesive bandage") and *hōtai* ("bandage wrap"). Unfortunately, this language difference forced the translator to use *hōtai* , which removes the intended ambiguity and prevents Japanese players from experiencing the same confusion as English-speaking players.

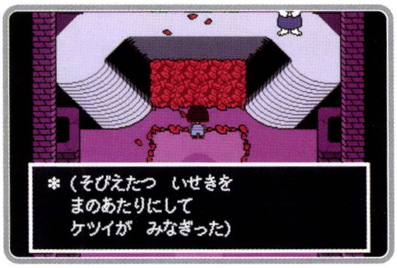
"There… are… TWO bandages!"

Getting Determination

It was clear to everyone involved that "determination" represented one of the biggest translation choices in the entire game



＊(The shadow of the ruins
looms above, filling you with
determination.)



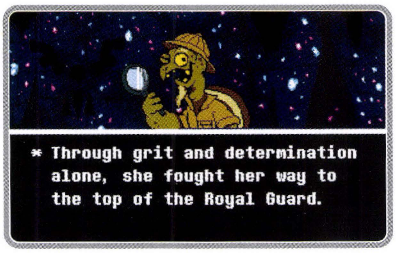
＊（そびえたつ　いせきを
まのあたりにして
ケツイが　みなぎった）

One of the most important concepts in *Undertale* is known as "determination". At first, the use of this word doesn't seem particularly noteworthy, but its significance grows as the game progresses. The word also carries several extra meanings unique to *Undertale*, so Toby naturally left many notes about it.

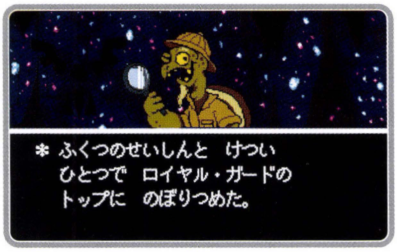
There are multiple words that can mean "determination" in Japanese, but none contain the multiple meanings behind *Undertale*'s "determination". For the localization team, this meant that certain things would be lost in translation no matter what. The term still needed to be translated into *something*, though, so after some discussion, the team settled on the word *ketsui* ("determination; resolve; decisiveness; a made-up mind") for *Undertale*'s "determination".

Generally Determined

Random trivia: Toby noted that the term "fallen down" was a partially cut concept for describing the state someone enters just before death



＊ Through grit and determination
alone, she fought her way to
the top of the Royal Guard.



＊ ふくつのせいしんと　けつい
ひとつで　ロイヤル・ガードの
トップに　のぼりつめた。

After the localization team chose to translate "determination" as *ketsui*, another problem appeared: what happens when words like "determination" or "determined" are used in a general sense rather than the *Undertale* sense? Luckily, Toby left notes about this issue too, and the localization staff double-checked with him as needed. The issue didn't come up much, but both Toby and 8-4 knew it was important to handle properly.

This left one last question: how do you differentiate between general *ketsui* and *Undertale*-style *ketsui* in the Japanese script? The solution, which Toby also suggested, was to use eye-catching *katakana* for *Undertale* "determination", and ordinary *hiragana* for more general determination.

If you're like me, reading "determination" so many times has probably turned your brain numb. Basically, Toby and 8-4 spent a lot of time on this one term to make sure it was always handled faithfully.

Localization Notes: Determination's Importance

Toby began by defining what "determination" is in the game and how it factors into the story in different ways:

Toby

> "Determination" – Possibly THE most important key word in the entire game. Should you change it, choosing a good word for this is really important. Meaning of the word determination as most commonly used in the game:
>
> - Resolve to continue
> - Will to live
> - Refusal to give up/die (appears to be related to fighting spirit in some cases)
>
> "Determination" also turns out to be Alphys' code word for an actual physical substance that she injects into monsters, one that humans produce naturally in large quantities. This substance has the following properties:
>
> - Creatures with too much are unable to die (de – termination)
> - The being with the most "Determination" in the underground has the power to change fate and use the in-game save/load system
>
> I think there are a few words like this in JP, right? You'll have to strike a good balance between what's the best fit. But also, "determination" is an unusual word, and thus it's really increased the quotability of the save point line ("It fills you with determination...") So if there's a way to get the meaning while also being a bit more iconic/quotable, go for that.

Toby frequently repeated the need to properly handle "determination" in translation:

Toby

> Mentioned elsewhere, but use the same word for "determination" throughout the entire game

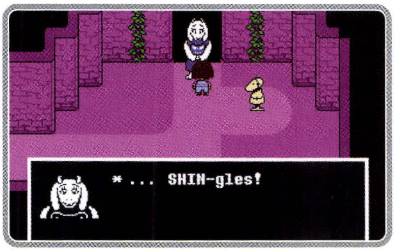
Toby clarified how to handle atypical instances of the word "determination" in translation:

Toby

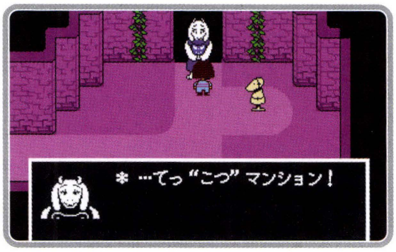
> All "determinations" are determination. However, I think depending on the context, (please tell me if this is a dumb idea) it could be put in hiragana or kanji instead of katakana instead? Because it's literally the same thing here (foreshadowing how she will melt when defeated due to her determination) but its meaning is more in a normal, less-conspicuous sense, even though it's pronounced the same way. So just 決意 [ketsui in kanji] or whatever. 決意 vs ケツイ [ketsui in katakana]
>
> IDK if there are other instances of this.

A Skeleton Pun

The translator considered other puns on *kotsu o tsukamu* ("get the hang of") and *kotsu ga iru* ("there's a trick/knack to it")



* ... SHIN-gles!



＊…てっ“こつ”マンション！

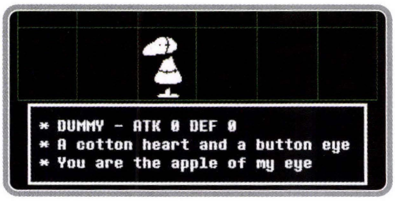
Toriel loves bad puns and shares many throughout the game. One early example is about skeletons:

English Text	Japanese Text (roughly translated)
What did the skeleton tile his roof with? SHIN-gles!	Where do skeletons live? *Tekkotsu* apartment buildings!

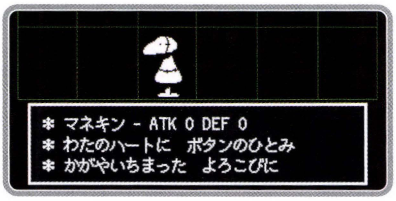
The original joke wouldn't work in a straightforward translation into Japanese, as it plays with the English words "shin" and "shingles". To compensate, the translator replaced the joke with a similar joke in Japanese that plays with the words *kotsu* (bone) and *tekkotsu* (steel frame). The result is a bad Japanese pun on par with the original English pun.

Poetry in Notion

Reader Challenge #2: Rewrite this English description to say roughly the same thing, but without using the letters E or F!



* DUMMY - ATK 0 DEF 0
* A cotton heart and a button eye
* You are the apple of my eye



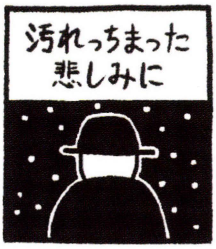
＊ マネキン - ATK 0 DEF 0
＊ わたのハートに ボタンのひとみ
＊ かがやいちまった よろこびに

The first real battle in *Undertale* takes place against a lifeless dummy. Checking this dummy in battle displays the short English description that Toby also described as a "meaningless poem":

> *A cotton heart and a button eye*
> *You are the apple of my eye*

Because the fanciful phrase "apple of my eye" isn't commonly used in Japanese, it was replaced with a lighthearted Japanese literary reference:

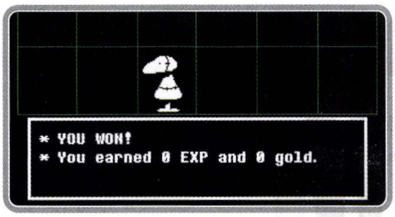
> *wata no hāto ni botan no hitomi* ("A cotton heart and a button eye")
> *kagayaitchimatta yorokobi ni* ("For the shining joy")


汚れっちまった
悲しみに

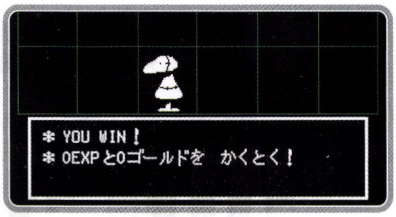
Yogoretchimatta Kanashimi Ni, first published in 1930, has since been adapted into many books, television shows, and movies

The second line in this description is a meaningless parody of a famous poem by Chūya Nakahara known as *Yogoretchimatta Kanashimi Ni* ("For the Tainted Sorrow"). This change ensures that the dummy's Japanese description is clearly recognizable as a poem, but leaves players confused by its meaningless content.

Victory Bound



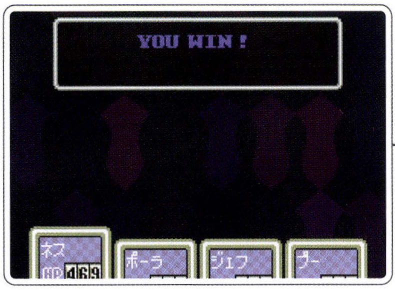
* YOU WON!
* You earned 0 EXP and 0 gold.



* YOU WIN !
* 0EXPと0ゴールドを かくとく!

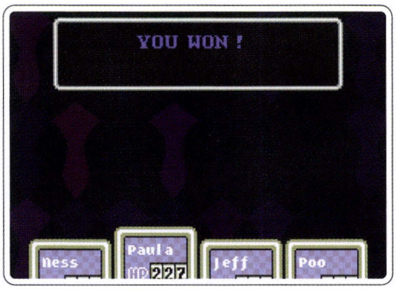
The 1990s JRPG references never stop in the world of *Undertale*!

In the English version of *Undertale*, the message "YOU WON!" appears after a successful battle. At Toby's direction, this was changed to "YOU WIN!" in the Japanese game. This minor rewording is actually an intentional reference to a change made during *MOTHER 2*'s English localization into *EarthBound*:



YOU WIN !

Original victory message (*MOTHER 2*)



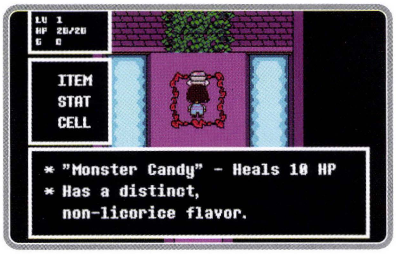
YOU WON !

Localized victory message (*EarthBound*)

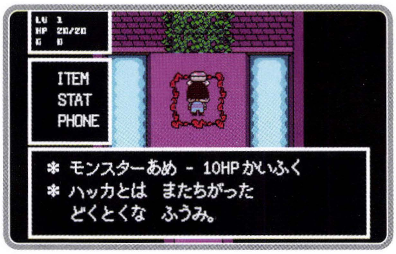
I've seen long discussions on Japanese message boards about why some things say "you win" in English and other things say "you won"

As we can see, the original Japanese version of *EarthBound* displayed "YOU WIN!" after each battle, but this was changed to "YOU WON!" for its English release. Toby was eager to keep this tradition alive with *Undertale*'s localization, just in the opposite direction.

Monstrous Flavors



* "Monster Candy" - Heals 10 HP
* Has a distinct,
non-licorice flavor.



* モンスターあめ - 10HPかいふく
* ハッカとは またちがった
どくとくな ふうみ。

You know how people avoid the licorice ones when eating jelly beans? The same thing happens in Japan, but with peppermint drops

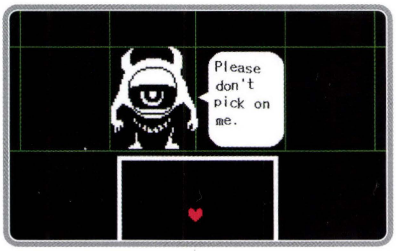
"Monster Candy" is available for free in the ruins. In English, this candy is described as having a "distinct, non-licorice" flavor. Licorice candy is popular in Western countries, but its striking flavor is also quite polarizing – some people love it, and some people despise it with a burning passion.

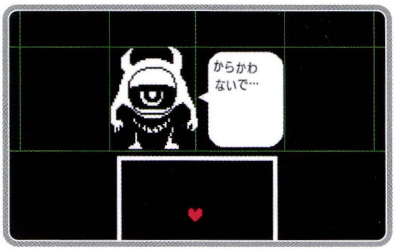
Licorice candy isn't as common in Japan, however, so the translator changed the candy to a different flavor: peppermint. Just like with licorice in the West, the peppermint flavor is highly divisive in Japan – some like it, and some would rather eat trash.

American licorice candies and Japanese peppermint candies. Will you eat?

Monster Picking

To be fair, I doubt more than a dozen people recognized the *Monster Party* quote in English, but Toby made the reference intentionally, so it was important to try to localize





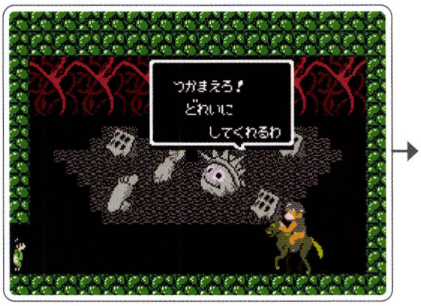
A bully eyeball monster named Loox appears in the Underground. In the English script, Loox says in battle:

> *Please don't pick on me.*

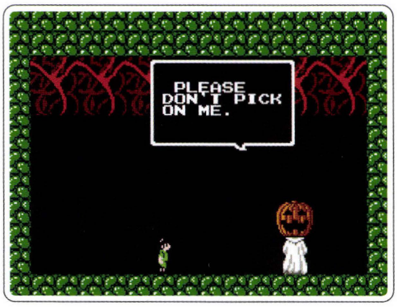
This seems like a simple, unimportant message at first, until the player is literally given the menu options "Pick On" and "Don't Pick On". Picking on Loox will make him more difficult to defeat, while not picking on him will allow the player to spare him.

Toby pointed out in his translation notes that Loox's line is actually a direct quote from the 1989 NES game, *Monster Party*. In this classic retro game, a pumpkin monster says "please don't pick on me" when the player enters its lair.

The Japanese version of this enemy, which is a parody of *Planet of the Apes*, roughly says "Seize him! He's to become our slave!"



A boss enemy in *Parody World: Monster Party* (Japan)



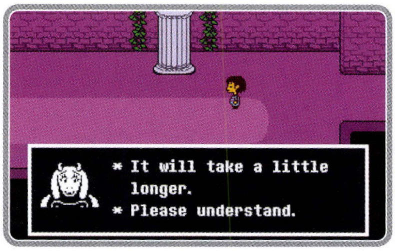
The same boss enemy in *Monster Party* (North America)

This retro game reference presented three problems for the translator:

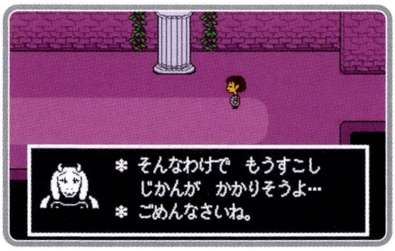
- Quoting the original Japanese version of *Monster Party* wouldn't work, as it featured very different monsters with completely different text
- Although a near-complete prototype exists, *Monster Party* was never officially released in Japan anyway
- Changing Loox's quote would most likely break the original bullying theme

The localization team hoped to find a fitting Japanese retro game quote for Loox's battle message. After some time, though, the team decided to prioritize the line's functional purpose over its decorative purpose. Thus, Loox still says "please don't pick on me" in Japanese, but only as a simple, straightforward statement.

Toriel Asks



* It will take a little longer.
* Please understand.



* そんなわけで もうすこし じかんが かかりそうよ…
* ごめんなさいね。

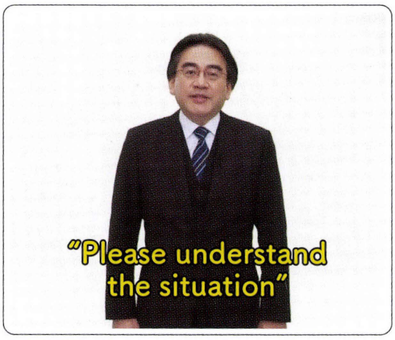
Without inside access to the localization team's notes, I probably never would've noticed this difference, as it's such a rarely seen line

Toriel asks the player to stay in the current room until she returns from an errand. If the player stays in the room for ten minutes, Toriel will call and say:

> *It will take a little longer. Please understand.*

Toby noted that "please understand" is a reference to Satoru Iwata, the former president of Nintendo. In his many English-language videos for Nintendo fans, Iwata often said "please understand", a literal translation of a common Japanese apology. He repeated this peculiar English phrase so often that it became his unofficial catchphrase in the West.

This reference would've been lost in a literal translation into Japanese, as Iwata was never famous for saying "please understand" in Japan. *Undertale*'s localizers considered potential replacement references, but eventually agreed that a natural-sounding translation took priority. Thus Toriel now says "I'm sorry" in Japanese instead of "please understand".



RIP Iwata, I wonder what he would've thought about *Undertale*

Localization Notes: "Please Understand"

Toby left a very short note about this line in the localization spreadsheet.

Toby

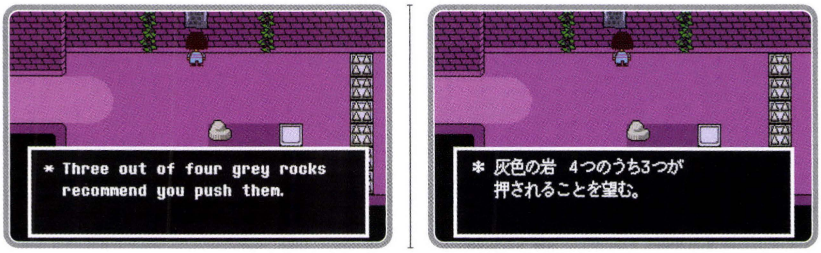
> Iwata's catch phrase

After some research and discussion, the translator localized the line into Japanese and left a note for reference.

Translator

> "Please Understand" = It's a meme in English speaking regions and apparently the typical 「ご理解ください」 *[gorikai kudasai]* has been translated into this. The Japanese phrase doesn't have any specific meme-related meaning and Toriel saying 「ごりかいください」 *[gorikai kudasai]* would break the character, so I've prioritized making the translation natural.

Rocky Majority



* Three out of four grey rocks
recommend you push them.

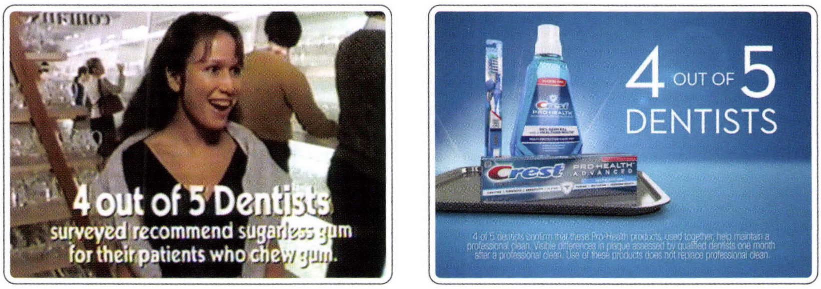
* 灰色の岩　4つのうち3つが
押されることを望む。

Juggling priorities is incredibly common in entertainment localization. Sometimes there are no perfect solutions to localization problems, only imperfect approximations

The main character comes across four rocks sitting next to four switches. Three of the rocks are easily pushed onto their switches, but a sign on a wall suggests that the fourth rock might be a bit different. In English, this sign says:

> *Three out of four grey rocks recommend you push them.*

Toby noted that this is a reference to American medicine and toothpaste commercials that use the cliché "X out of Y professionals recommend" phrase. He also pointed out that part of the joke is about how there is always that one weird person who disagrees for some reason. Except in this case, it's a rock.


4 out of 5 Dentists
surveyed recommend sugarless gum
for their patients who chew gum.
4 OUT OF 5
DENTISTS
Crest
PRO-HEALTH ADVANCED
4 of 5 dentists confirm that these Pro-Health products, used together, help maintain a professional clean. Visible differences in plaque assessed by qualified dentists one month after a professional clean. Use of these products does not replace professional clean.

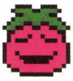
LEFT: The "X out of Y recommend" phrase really took off in the mid-1970s with Trident chewing gum

RIGHT: "X out of Y recommend" has been copied and parodied for almost 50 years, yet it remains in regular use today

The "X out of Y professionals recommend" phrase has been a part of Western pop culture for decades, but is largely unknown in Japan. As such, the reference would be lost in a straightforward translation. The localization team looked for a good Japanese equivalent, but nothing quite fit. So, they instead focused on the sign's other two functions: providing a hint for proceeding in the game, and warning the player that one of the rocks might be strange. Thus, the final Japanese line became a literal, straightforward statement:

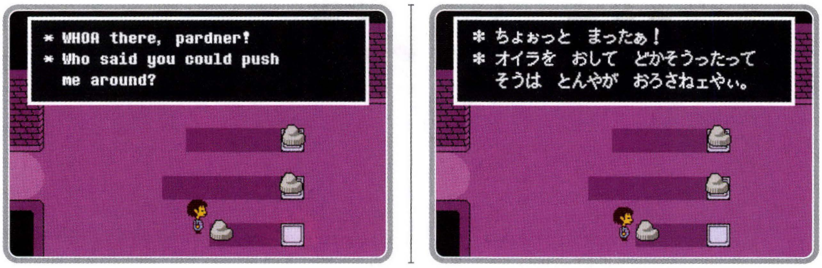
> *Three out of four gray rocks wish to be pushed.*

As we can see, the original pop culture reference was dropped, but the sign's usefulness within the game remains the same.



As a translator, recognizing pop culture references can be a bigger challenge than localizing them. It's not really a skill that's taught in textbooks or classes – you just have to absorb on your own. Even then, you'll never know as much about a country's pop culture as a native who grew up surrounded by it. This is why it was so helpful to have Toby involved in *Undertale*'s localization process, along with others who grew up surrounded by the same pop culture.

Rock and Roll



* WHOA there, pardner!
* Who said you could push
me around?

＊ ちょぉっと　まったぁ！
＊ オイラを　おして　どかそうったって
そうは　とんやが　おろさねェやぃ。

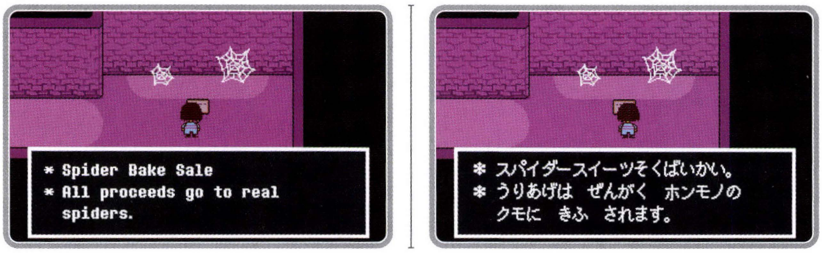
So, have you been reading these captions first or the main text first? I wonder what most people do first

Indeed, it turns out that one gray rock doesn't want to be pushed. In English, the rock speaks with an unusual accent and uses words like "pardner" and "pumpkin" that give off a "cowboy" or "person from Texas" vibe.

Toby noted that it wasn't important for the Japanese script to retain this rock's rural speech – the rock just needed to sound unique. Thus the rock now uses a distinctive speaking style associated with *Edokko*, a class of citizens who lived in Edo (now known as Tokyo) in the late 1700s and early 1800s. This speaking style evokes a special combination of assertive brashness and cheerful straightforwardness.

An *Edokko* man, as depicted in a 1947 Japanese film

Arachnid Fundraising



* Spider Bake Sale
* All proceeds go to real
spiders.

＊ スパイダースイーツそくばいかい。
＊ うりあげは　ぜんがく　ホンモノの
クモに　きふ　されます。

It's crazy how even a tiny thing like this shop can have such a big effect on later events in the game

Spiders are holding a bake sale in the underground ruins, with doughnuts and cider available for purchase. Supporting the spiders here can have an effect on later events in the game, so the bake sale isn't a simple, unimportant shop.

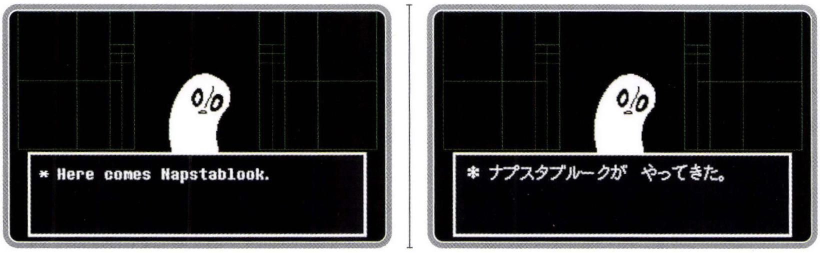
There's one problem, though: bake sales aren't very common in Japan. The team eventually decided to localize "bake sale" as *sokubaikai* ("sales exhibition"), which is roughly equivalent to the "Artist Alley" vendor areas commonly seen at entertainment conventions in the West.

VOLUNTEER
BAKE SALE TODAY!
物販見本
Product Samples
ゲームグッズ

LEFT: Bake sales are generally small fundraising activities for clubs, etc.

RIGHT: Japanese sales exhibitions are kind of like "Artist Alleys" at entertainment conventions

The Ghost with the Least

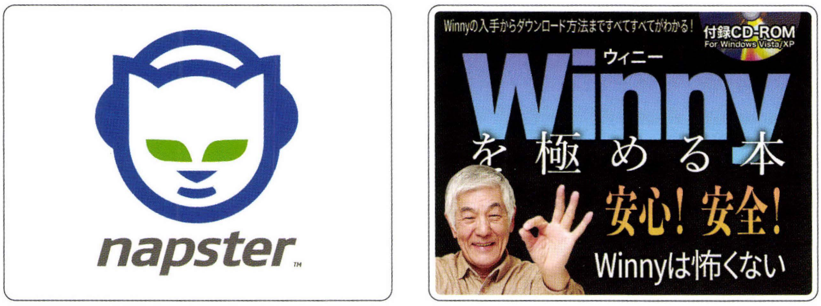

* Here comes Napstablook.

＊ ナプスタブルークが　やってきた。

Napstablook's association with "Napster" is why the character owns a computer, uses the Underground's version of the Internet, and listens to music

In the ruins is a sleeping ghost named "Napstablook". As Toby explains it, this name was originally randomly generated and had no actual inherent meaning:

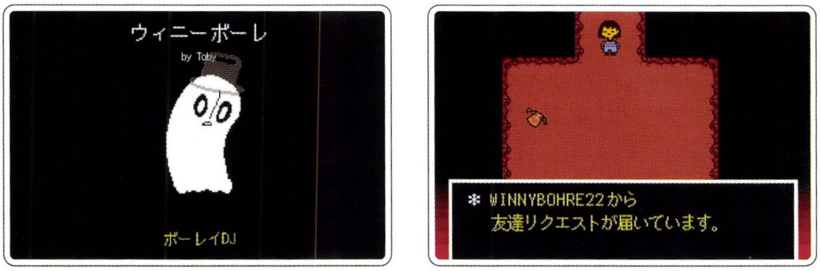
> *Basically I used the name to come up with the character. So "blook" sounds like a ghost, then "nap" --> it sleeps, with zzz. After the demo, people noticed "napsta" sounded like Napster* [a popular file-sharing service in the early 2000s], *so I added the Napster joke as well. Then I explained all of this simultaneously to the translator.*


napster
Winnyの入手からダウンロード方法まですべてすべてがわかる!
付録CD-ROM
For Windows Vista/XP
ウィニー
Winny
を極める本
安心! 安全!
Winnyは怖くない

LEFT: Napstablook is often depicted wearing headphones like in the Napster logo

RIGHT: Winny was the big file-sharing service in Japan for a while in the 2000s

Because Napstablook's name contains an old Internet reference, the localizers considered giving the character a name with a similar Japanese reference. For this reason, early drafts of the Japanese script called Napstablook "Winnybohre". "Winny" was a Japanese file-sharing service that was popular in the mid-2000s, and "bohre" is a play on the Japanese word *bōrei*, a type of ghost.

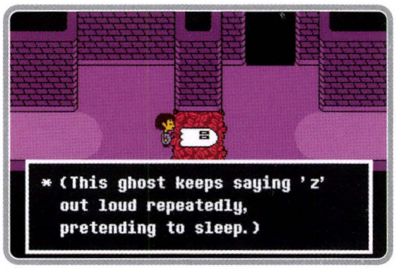


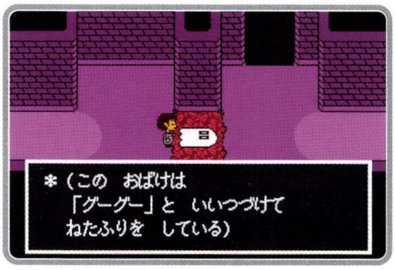
＊ WINNYBOHRE22 から
友達リクエストが届いています。

To Pikachu, or not to Pikachu? Whether it's for memorability, consistency, or simplicity's sake, there is some merit in leaving a meaningful name unlocalized for international audiences

Initially, Toby wasn't sure that "Winnybohre" suited the character. He understood the reasoning behind the choice and wasn't against the idea of renaming Napstablook, so he waited to see if the name grew on him. It still felt off months later, so he reverted the name back to "Napstablook" before the Japanese release.

Ghostly Definition


* (This ghost keeps saying 'z'
out loud repeatedly,
pretending to sleep.)


＊（この　おばけは
「グーグー」と　いいつづけて
ねたふりを　している）

Big game companies spend tons of money to make awesome, realistic-looking characters with spiffy designs and outfits… and then Toby comes along and makes a round rectangle with eyes

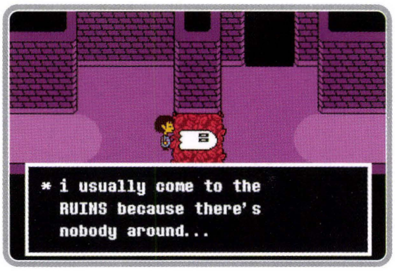
Napstablook's identity was also a concern for the localization staff. First, because the English script refers to Napstablook as "them" rather than "him" or "her", the localization team kept Napstablook's gender unstated and unclear as much as possible in the Japanese script.

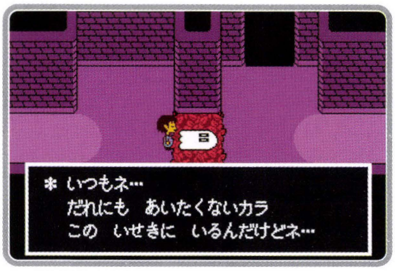
Secondly, Napstablook is referred to as a "ghost" in English, but there are many words for "ghost" in Japanese. Unfortunately, these words have their own unique nuances and definitions, none of which are a 100% match with the Western-style "sheet ghost". As a result, Napstablook's ghost classification changed throughout *Undertale*'s localization. These classifications included:

- *yūrei* – the ghost of a dead person with a grudge or lingering regrets
- *bōrei* – the ghost of a dead person that can't rest in peace
- *obake* – a ghost, monster, or supernatural creature that scares people

After stepping back and looking at the finished Japanese script as a whole, the localizers chose to classify Napstablook as an *obake*.

Napstablook Speaks


* i usually come to the
RUINS because there's
nobody around...


＊ いつもネ…
だれにも　あいたくないカラ
この　いせきに　いるんだけどネ…

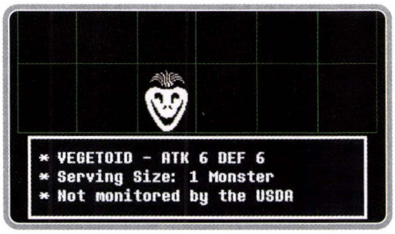
I remember when they had to explain the meaning of ":)" in movies, so it's been fascinating to see other online speech patterns – such as using all-lowercase text – show up more and more in popular media

Napstablook is insecure and has little self-worth, which is partially conveyed by a unique speech style: all of their text is written with lowercase characters. This not only supplements Napstablook's dialogue, but also allows the player to identify anonymous messages from Napstablook elsewhere in the game.

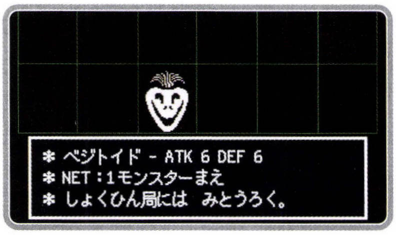
Because the Japanese language doesn't have uppercase and lowercase letters, the translator compensated by giving Napstablook an "I'm worthless, what does anything matter" tone, along with a speaking style that mixes *hiragana* and *katakana* in a unusual manner. In this way, the Japanese version of Napstablook parallels the English version in style and substance.

Rotten to the Core

Theory: Mt. Ebott is in the United States because the game references the USDA. Toby's response when I asked: "USDA could be UNDERGROUND SALAD DEMON ASSOCIATION"



* VEGETOID - ATK 6 DEF 6
* Serving Size: 1 Monster
* Not monitored by the USDA



＊ ベジトイド - ATK 6 DEF 6
＊ NET：1モンスターまえ
＊ しょくひん局には みとうろく。

A monster named Vegetoid lives in the ruins. In the English script, Vegetoid's in-battle description is a parody of the text commonly seen on real-life food labels. Specifically, the description contains a reference to the United States Department of Agriculture:

> *Serving Size: 1 Monster*
> *Not monitored by the USDA*

USDA
INSPECTED

Note: this label appearing in this book does not mean this book is USDA approved

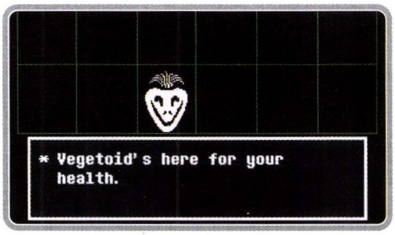
The meaning of "USDA" would be lost on most players in Japan, so the translator adjusted the description to say:

> *Serves: 1 Monster*
> *Not registered with the Food Safety Bureau*

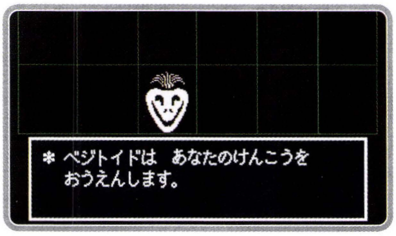
Generalizing the description like this makes the original "in-group joke" more accessible to Japanese players. In fact, this new description could conceivably work in any country in the world!

Healthy Eating

Pop culture references are always a problem, even before translation gets involved – not everyone will get them to begin with, and they grow more dated with every passing minute



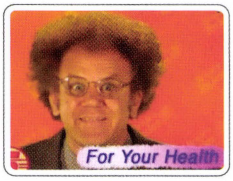
* Vegetoid's here for your health.



＊ ベジトイドは あなたのけんこうを
おうえんします。

During the battle with Vegetoid, the battle narration occasionally states:

> *Vegetoid's here for your health.*



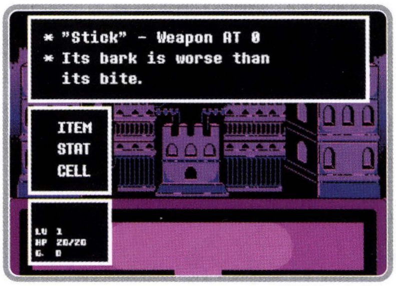
Fictional doctor Steve Brule offers ridiculous health tips like "put vinegar on your armpits if they stink" and ends by saying "...for your health!"

Toby pointed out in his notes that "for your health" is a reference to Dr. Steve Brule's catchphrase from the American comedy television programs *Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!* and *Check It Out! with Dr. Steve Brule*. He also noted that it wasn't important to include a similar reference in the Japanese script, so the translator gave the line a straightforward translation:

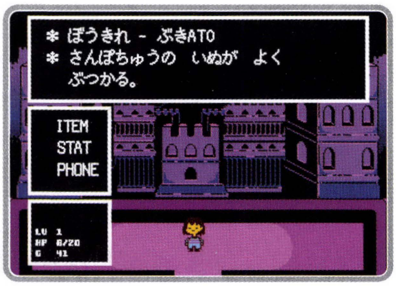
> *Vegetoid supports your health.*

Even without the original reference, the primary joke about Vegetoid attacking you while "supporting your health" still works perfectly in Japanese.

Sticking to It



* "Stick" - Weapon AT 0
* Its bark is worse than
its bite.



＊ ぼうきれ - ぶきAT0
＊ さんぽちゅうの いぬが よく
ぶつかる。

Another Japanese semi-proverb that I really like is "the weaker the dog, the more it barks"

The main character's initial weapon is a simple wooden stick. In English, the stick's description is:

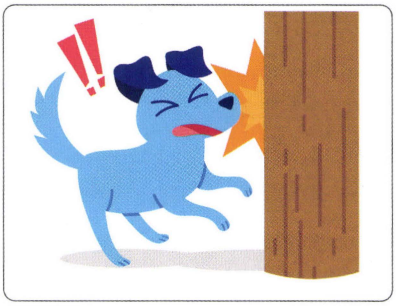
> *Its bark is worse than its bite.*

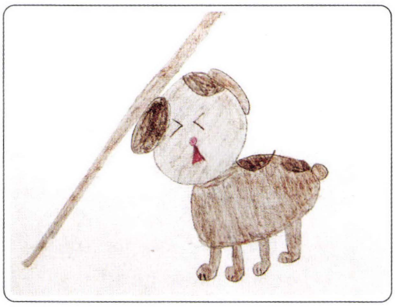
This is a groaningly simple pun on the word "bark" – as in "tree bark" – and the dog-themed English idiom, "its bark is worse than its bite".

This English-language joke would be lost in a straightforward translation, so the localizers replaced it with a simple joke about a Japanese proverb:

> *Dogs on walks often run into these.*

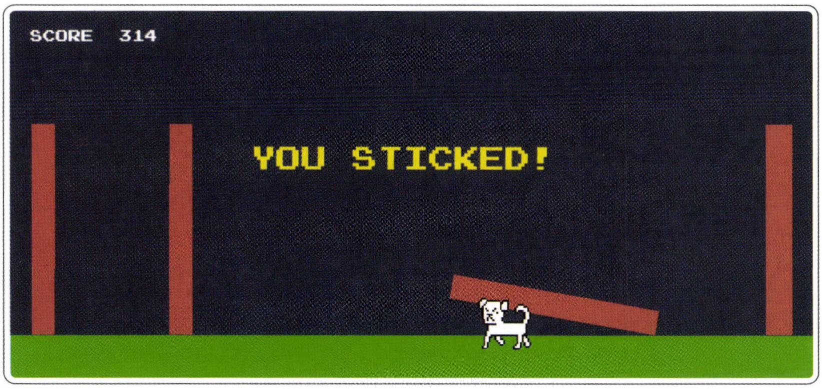
This is a comedic reference to one of *the* most famous proverbs in the Japanese language: "even a dog runs into a stick/pole when walking". Originally, this proverb meant something like "if you're too forward, you'll meet with disaster", but it has since gained the separate meaning of "nothing ventured, nothing gained".





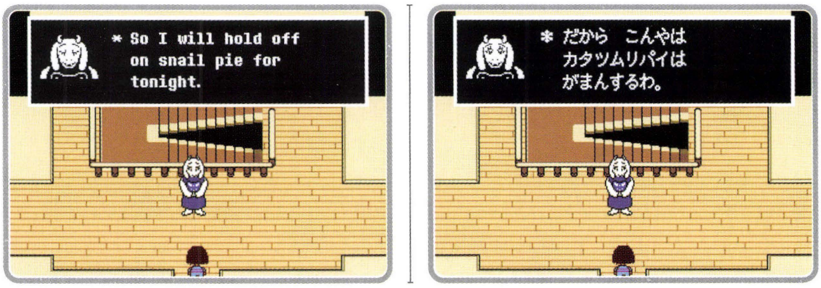
This dog proverb is why so many things in Japan show dogs walking into sticks and poles

I don't think I've ever seen a dog walk into a stick or pole in real life, now that I think about it



Peculiar Pies

I wonder if any especially zealous fans have made snail pie after seeing it referenced in *Undertale*, similar to how *EarthBound* fans have made real-life trout yogurt

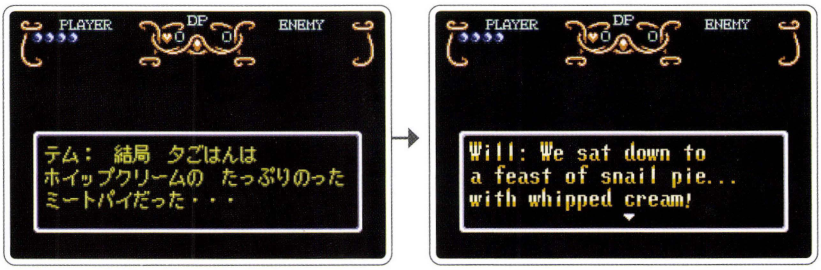

* So I will hold off on snail pie for tonight.

＊ だから こんやは カタツムリパイは がまんするわ。

Toriel suggests that she was considering baking "snail pie" to celebrate the main character's arrival. This outlandish-sounding dish is a reference to *Illusion of Gaia*, one of Toby's favorite Japanese games from the mid-1990s.

The *Undertale* translator encountered an unexpected problem when translating this line, however: the original Japanese version of *Illusion of Gaia* never mentioned "snail pie" – it was originally just "meat pie", which doesn't sound nearly as bizarre or memorable.

I feel that calling it "meat pie with whipped cream on top" would make the *Illusion of Gaia* reference recognizable, but then the snail connection to Toriel's book later on would be lost



テム： 結局 夕ごはんは ホイップクリームの たっぷりのった ミートパイだった・・・

Will: We sat down to a feast of snail pie... with whipped cream!

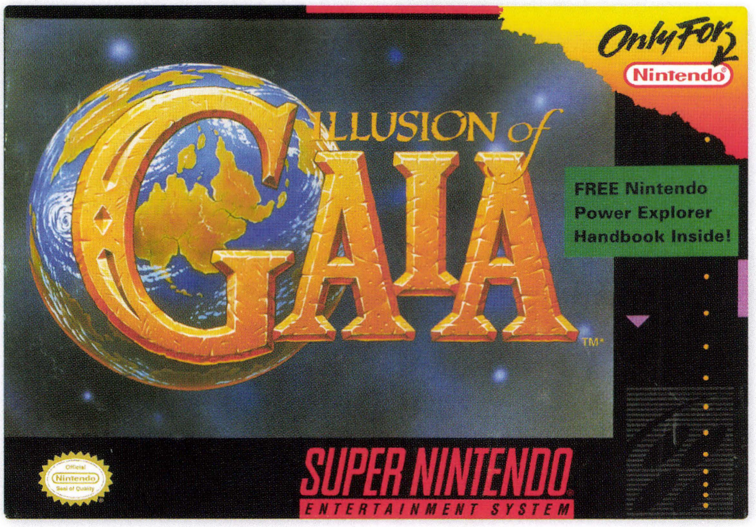
Because Toby's original "snail pie" reference would be lost on Japanese *Undertale* players, the translator had to make a choice:

- Leave it as "snail pie" in Japanese, which would avoid the need to write all-new text when Toriel later quotes a book called *72 Uses for Snails*
- Use "meat pie" to stay consistent with the original *Illusion of Gaia* reference and write all-new text for the *72 Uses for Snails* quotes, even though the reference would be almost impossible to recognize
- Force some other bizarre food reference into the line and write all-new text for the *72 Uses for Snails* quotes

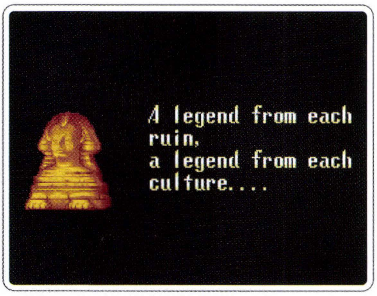
The localization team weighed the options and chose to keep it "snail pie" in the Japanese script.

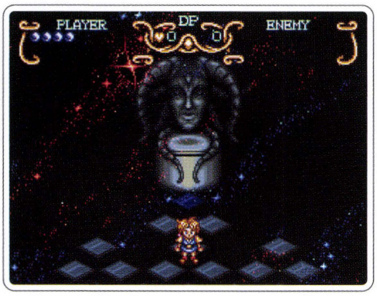
As a translation student, I was taught the importance of studying influential literature to broaden my knowledge base. I think the same is equally as important for entertainment translation, except you'd have to study hundreds of movies, play hundreds of games, and so on. I wonder if any universities out there study game translations the same way they study literary translations.

Inspiration Spotlight: *Illusion of Gaia*


Only For Nintendo
ILLUSION of GAIA
FREE Nintendo Power Explorer Handbook Inside!
Official Nintendo Seal of Quality
SUPER NINTENDO
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

ENIX
ガイア幻想紀


A legend from each ruin,
a legend from each culture....

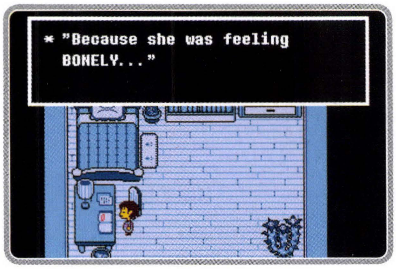

PLAYER
DP
ENEMY

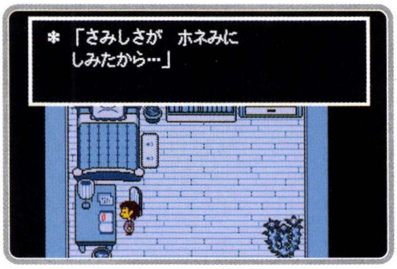
In 1993, Enix released a Super Famicom action role-playing game known as *Gaia Gensōki* ("Gaia Fantasy Chronicle") in Japan. An English version debuted as *Illusion of Gaia* in North America in 1994, and as *Illusion of Time* in Europe in 1995. The English script features many translation mishaps and unusual localization choices that remain memorable to this day.

The game sends the teenage hero to many real-world locations in his quest to save humankind from a great evil. The hero gains abilities and powerful alter egos, leading to a climactic battle in space.

Another Skeleton Pun

You know how in fighting games, characters have different stats like speed, strength, etc.? Translators have stats too, and one is "good at translating bad jokes"


* "Because she was feeling BONELY..."


＊「さみしさが　ホネみに
しみたから…」

Another skeleton pun is found in Toriel's home. In English, the joke replaces the word "lonely" with a bone-themed rhyme:

> *Why did the skeleton want a friend? Because she was feeling BONELY...*

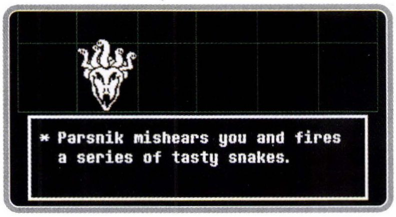
This joke would be lost in a literal translation, so the translator replaced it with a different Japanese joke:

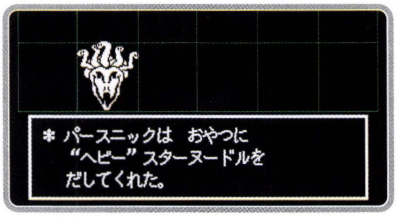
> *Why'd the skeleton want a friend? Because the loneliness pierced to the bone...*

As we can see, the setup to the joke is the same in Japanese, and the punchline manages to stay groaningly close to the original.

Snake Snack

To access the game's Hard Mode, start a new game, then give yourself a certain human's name...


* Parsnik mishears you and fires a series of tasty snakes.

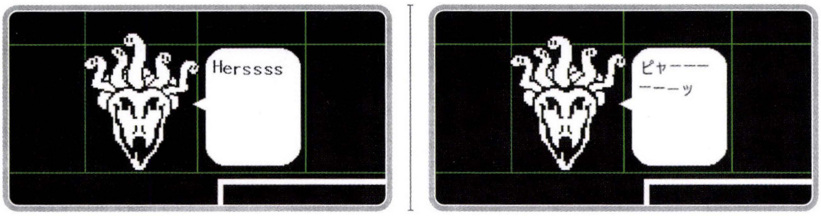

＊ パースニックは　おやつに
“ヘビー” スターヌードルを
だしてくれた。

A snake-haired enemy named Parsnik appears in the ruins during *Undertale*'s secret Hard Mode. In the English version, a battle option titled "Snack" becomes available during this encounter. Occasionally, Parsnik mishears this "snack" as "snake", then aggressively offers "tasty snakes" to the player.

The translator localized this wordplay by having Parsnik offer "Hebi Star Noodles" in Japanese. This name plays with the words *hebi* ("snake") and *bebī* ("baby") to humorously refer to Baby Star Ramen, a famous Japanese snack. Second, the noodles in Baby Star Ramen roughly look like countless baby snakes. The result is a snake-themed snack joke that parallels the original line in a uniquely Japanese way.

Baby Star Ramen, popular since the 1950s, is made of squiggly, crunchy noodles

Possessive Parsnik Pun

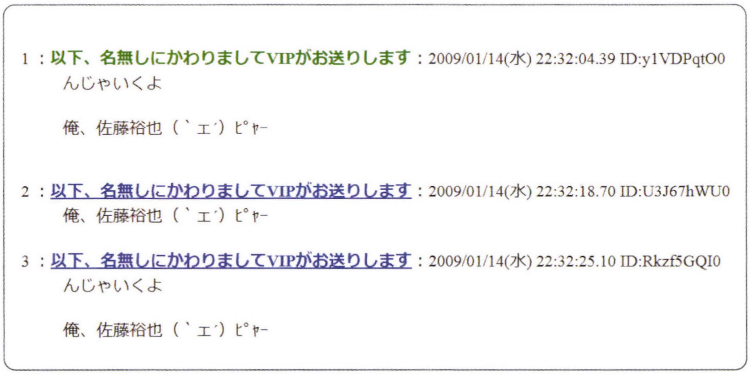


Given Toby's fondness for including Internet jokes in the English script, this Japanese localization choice turned out to be surprisingly fitting

In the English game, Parsnik utters snake sounds such as "hissss" during battle. On rare occasion, though, Parsnik will instead say "herssss" – a surprise play on the words "his" and "hers". This joke would be lost in a literal translation, so the translator replaced it with a completely different Japanese joke.

In Japanese, snakes make a "shaaaa" sound when they hiss, so Parsnik normally says *shaaaa* during battle. Parsnik's alternate hissing sound was localized as *pyaaaa*, which rhymes with *shaaaa* and refers to a legendary Japanese message board post involving a funny face shouting "pyaaaa" for no clear reason.

The Power of Pyaaaa



1 ：以下、名無しにかわりましてVIPがお送りします：2009/01/14(水) 22:32:04.39 ID:y1VDPqtO0
んじゃいくよ

俺、佐藤裕也（｀エ´）ﾋﾟｬｰ

2 ：以下、名無しにかわりましてVIPがお送りします：2009/01/14(水) 22:32:18.70 ID:U3J67hWU0
俺、佐藤裕也（｀エ´）ﾋﾟｬｰ

3 ：以下、名無しにかわりましてVIPがお送りします：2009/01/14(水) 22:32:25.10 ID:Rkzf5GQI0
んじゃいくよ

俺、佐藤裕也（｀エ´）ﾋﾟｬｰ

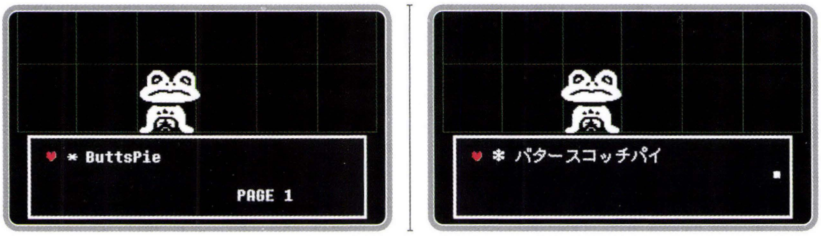
In 2009, a user on a popular Japanese message board started a new message thread titled "Let's Reveal Our Real Names in this Thread". The thread began with this post:

> *Okay, here goes!*
> *I'm Yuya Satō* （｀エ´） *pyaaa!*

Because staying anonymous was central to this message board's culture, the very premise of the thread was ridiculous. The result: over a thousand replies of "I'm Yuya Satō too, pyaaaa!", "What a coincidence, I'm Yuya Satō too!", and other sarcastic remarks.

The sheer silliness of the thread, its content, and its enormous response transformed the original post into a Japanese Internet legend. To this day, comical references to Yuya Satō's post and nonsensical shout can be seen on Japanese websites and in Japanese entertainment.

Abbreviated Items



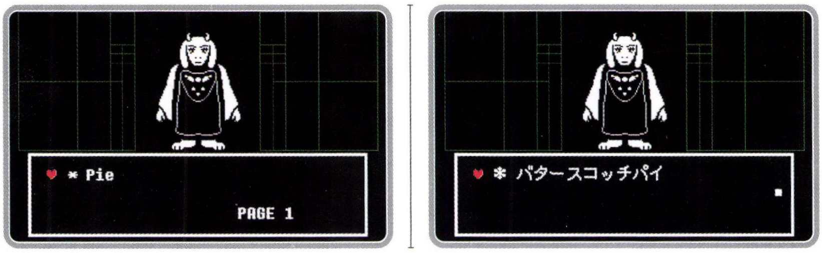
"Butterscotch Pie" is humorously abbreviated as "ButtsPie" in English, but is left full-length in Japanese

In the English version of *Undertale*, every item has three names: a standard name that can be quite long, an abbreviated name for battle menus, and an abbreviated name for battle menus during serious scenes.

It's not obvious at first, but these abbreviated names serve multiple functions:

1. Some names need to be shortened to fit in the limited text space
2. The shortened names are a parody of the odd name abbreviations found in old Japanese-to-English game localizations
3. Toby wanted some items to have intentionally funny abbreviations

As an example of the third function, "Butterscotch Pie" is normally abbreviated as the humorous "ButtsPie" in battle. But to avoid ruining the mood during serious scenes, Toby implemented the second set of "serious" abbreviations. Thus "ButtsPie" becomes "Pie" during important battles.



In serious battles, "Butterscotch Pie" is instead abbreviated as "Pie" in English, while the name remains its full length in Japanese

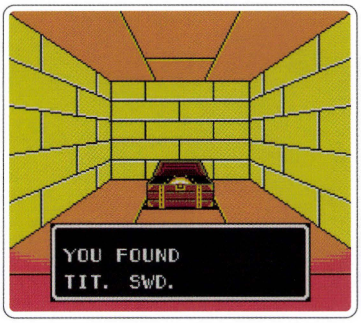
Although name abbreviations were common in old games localized into English, such abbreviations weren't as pervasive in Japanese-language games – after all, it's easy to say a lot in Japanese with only a few characters. So although the two extra sets of abbreviated names made sense for the English release, there was no strong reason to implement them in the Japanese version.

With this in mind, Toby and the localization team decided to only use one set of full-length Japanese item names. This new approach meant that the original two-column item menu needed to be reprogrammed into a one-column item menu with a scrollbar. And because the player can switch between the English and Japanese versions of the game at any time, all of this new program code needed to safely coexist with the original game's code.

In short, the English and Japanese versions of *Undertale* treat item names quite differently, while also following the expectations of their specific audiences.

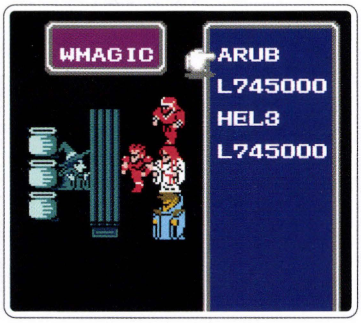
Text Abbreviations in Retro Game Translations

In general, Japanese words can be written with fewer characters than English words. This difference often requires English text to be abbreviated in Japanese-to-English game translations. Such abbreviation-filled games were especially common in Japanese RPGs translated during the 1990s. Naturally, heavy text abbreviations can lead to confusion, unintentional laughs, or even complete loss of meaning.

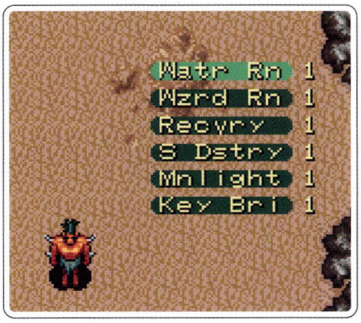


YOU FOUND
TIT. SWD.

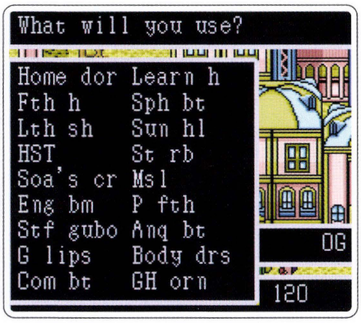
Phantasy Star
(Master System, 1988)


WMAGIC
ARUB
L745000
HEL3
L745000

Final Fantasy
(NES, 1990)


Watr Rn 1
Wzrd Rn 1
Recvry 1
S Dstry 1
Mnlight 1
Key Bri 1

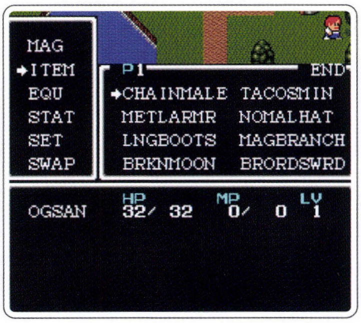
The 7th Saga
(Super NES, 1993)



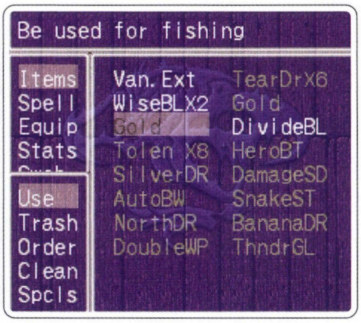
What will you use?

Home dor
Learn h
Fth h
Sph bt
Lth sh
Sun hl
HST
St rb
Soa's cr
Msl
Eng bm
P fth
Stf gubo
Anq bt
G lips
Body drs
Com bt
GH orn
0G
120

Paladin's Quest
(Super NES, 1993)


MAG
➔ITEM
EQU
STAT
SET
SWAP
P1
END
➔CHAINMALE
TACOSMIN
METLARMR
NOMALHAT
LNGBOOTS
MAGBRANCH
BRKNMOON
BRORDSWRD
OGSAN
HP 32/ 32
MP 0/ 0
LV 1

Secret of the Stars
(Super NES, 1995)



Be used for fishing

Items
Spell
Equip
Stats
Use
Trash
Order
Clean
Spcls
Van. Ext
TearDrX6
WiseBLX2
Gold
Gold
DivideBL
Tolen X8
HeroBT
SilverDR
DamageSD
AutoBW
SnakeST
NorthDR
BananaDR
DoubleWP
ThndrGL

Breath of Fire II
(Super NES, 1995)

Snowdin

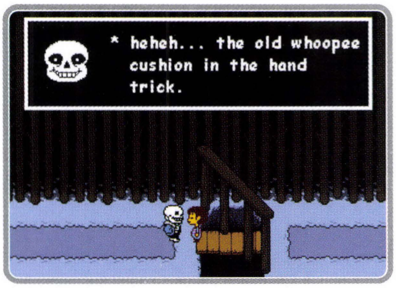
Snowdin

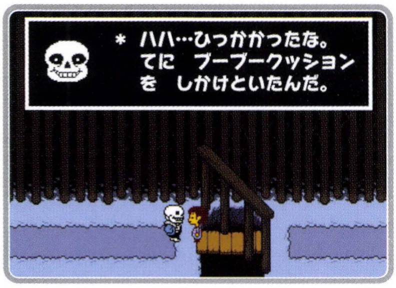
Screwball Skeletons Puzzle Wandering Human

Beyond the underground ruins lies a vast land of snow filled with outlandish monsters and tricky traps. The lights of a small town twinkle in the distance.

Presenting Sans

Random trivia: A web comic about a skeleton named "Helvetica" inspired Toby to name *Undertale*'s skeletons after fonts too


* heheh... the old whoopee cushion in the hand trick.

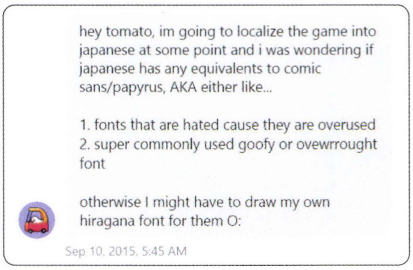

＊ ハハ…ひっかかったな。
てに ブーブークッション
を しかけといたんだ。

A goofy skeleton named Sans plays a major role in *Undertale*. His name comes from a popular – and notorious – English computer font known as "Comic Sans". Unsurprisingly, Sans' English dialogue text uses the Comic Sans font.

Before he released *Undertale* in English, Toby already hoped to release a Japanese version of the game someday. But he was concerned that the connection between the name "Sans" and the English "Comic Sans" font might be lost on Japanese players. For this reason, 8-4's localization team initially suggested naming Sans "Pop", in reference to a similarly popular-but-notorious Japanese font known as "Sōeikaku Pop-tai".

LEFT: Toby asks me about bad Japanese fonts in 2015, before *Undertale*'s English release

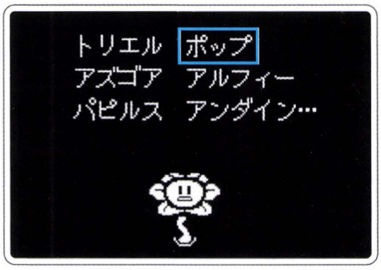
RIGHT: Sans is referred to as "Pop" in an early draft of the Japanese localization


hey tomato, im going to localize the game into japanese at some point and i was wondering if japanese has any equivalents to comic sans/papyrus, AKA either like...

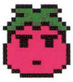
1. fonts that are hated cause they are overused
2. super commonly used goofy or ovewrrought font

otherwise I might have to draw my own hiragana font for them O:

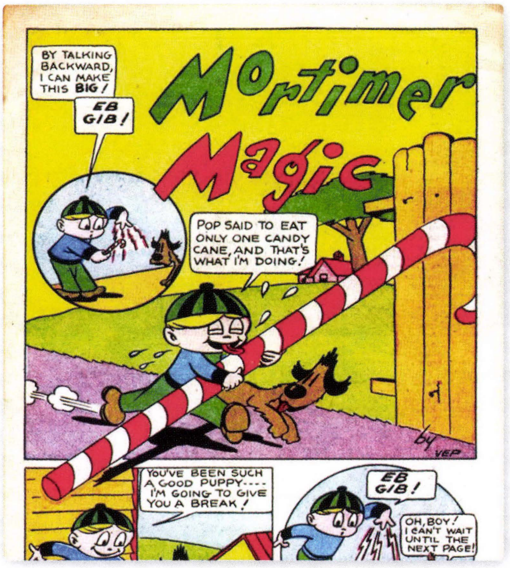
Sep 10, 2015, 5:45 AM



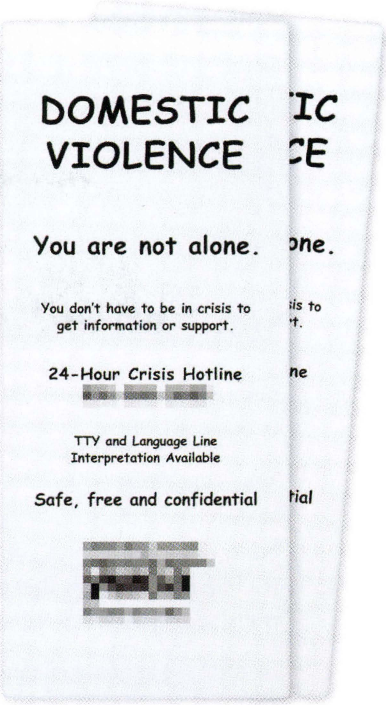
The name "Pop" had drawbacks, however: early fans were already attached to Sans' name, the Sōeikaku Pop-tai font was a slightly more professional font than Comic Sans, and the name had a very different ring to it. So it wasn't too surprising when the team decided to revert "Pop" back to "Sans" a few months before the Japanese game's release.



Because *Undertale* relies so much on different fonts and font-related jokes, Japanese fans have had a lot to say about the official localization's font choices. This is good example of how the localization process, by its very nature, can produce new, significant debate over matters that never concerned the original audience.


BY TALKING BACKWARD, I CAN MAKE THIS BIG!
EB GIB!
Mortimer Magic
POP SAID TO EAT ONLY ONE CANDY CANE, AND THAT'S WHAT I'M DOING!
by VEP
YOU'VE BEEN SUCH A GOOD PUPPY---- I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU A BREAK!
EB GIB!
OH, BOY! I CAN'T WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT PAGE!

The Comic Sans computer font was designed to approximate the lettering style used in English-language comic books such as this one



DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

You are not alone.

You don't have to be in crisis to get information or support.

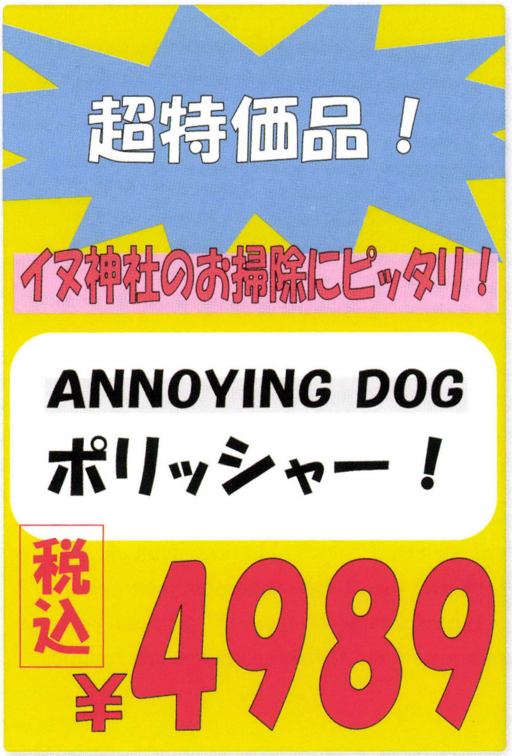
24-Hour Crisis Hotline
[redacted]

TTY and Language Line
Interpretation Available

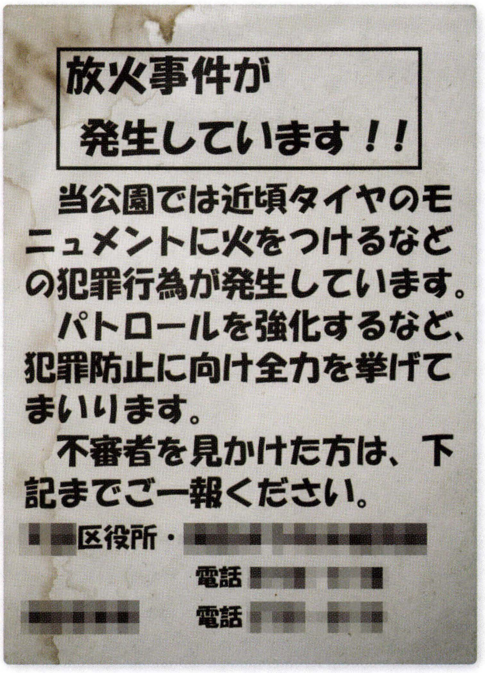
Safe, free and confidential

[redacted]

Casual use of Comic Sans is rampant and can sometimes come across as wildly unsuitable


超特価品！
イヌ神社のお掃除にピッタリ！
ANNOYING DOG
ポリッシャー！
税込
¥4989

The Sōeikaku Pop-tai font was designed for Japanese POP (point of purchase) signs and in-store promo materials



放火事件が
発生しています！！

当公園では近頃タイヤのモニュメントに火をつけるなどの犯罪行為が発生しています。

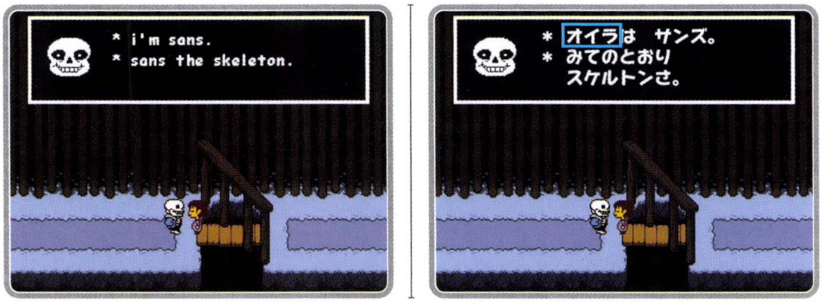
パトロールを強化するなど、犯罪防止に向け全力を挙げてまいります。

不審者を見かけた方は、下記までご一報ください。

[redacted]区役所・[redacted]
電話 [redacted]
[redacted] 電話 [redacted]

Sōeikaku Pop-tai is often poorly used – here it's on a city notice about a recent series of arsons and crimes

Sans Speaks, Japan is Shocked



* i'm sans.
* sans the skeleton.

* オイラは サンズ。
* みてのとおり
スケルトンさ。

Sans uses the personal pronoun オイラ (*oira*) in the final Japanese script

Before translating Sans' dialogue into Japanese, the translator had to decide which of the many Japanese personal pronouns best fit Sans' character.

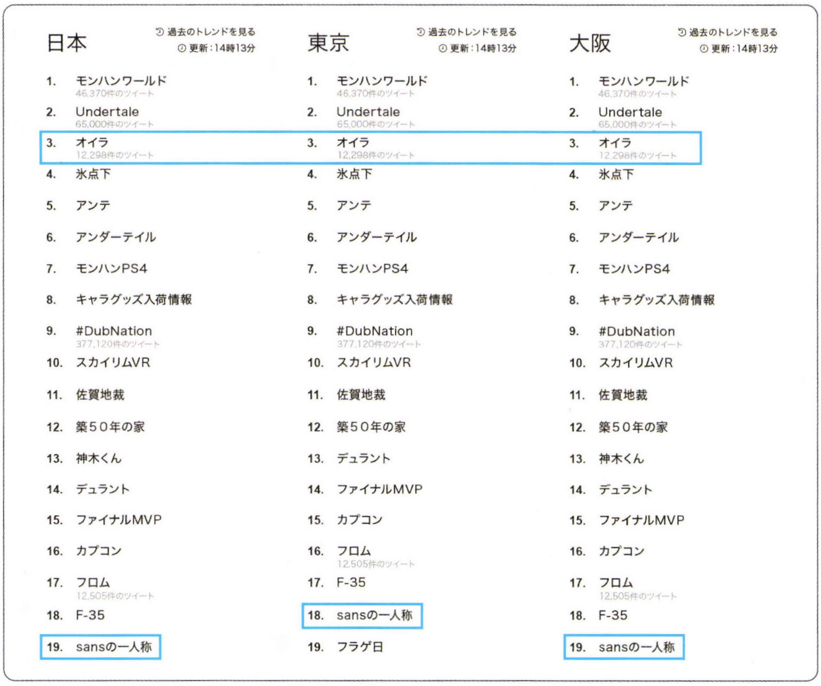
After consulting with Toby, the translator settled on *oira* for Sans' pronoun. In everyday Japanese, *oira* gives off a "rural, unsophisticated bumpkin" vibe, but in entertainment it's also used by aloof, happy-go-lucky characters. It's important to note that this choice clashed with the existing fan-made translations, in which Sans used the more assertive pronoun *ore*.

In 2017, 8-4 announced details about *Undertale*'s upcoming Japanese release. This announcement included a video of Sans using *oira*. Fans accustomed to the fan-made translations reacted loudly to this unexpected pronoun choice – some responded with intense negativity, some responded with bewilderment, and others responded with humor. Online reactions grew so intense that the incident was quickly dubbed the "Oira Shock".

Despite the massive response to Sans' new pronoun, the team stuck with *oira* for several reasons:

- *Oira* seems fitting for Sans' normal, laid-back, wisecracking personality
- Sans' all-lowercase text gives him a distinctive, carefree vibe that's lost in translation, so giving him a similarly distinctive pronoun felt like a natural replacement
- Using *oira* in normal situations allows Sans to switch to the more intense *ore* when he turns deadly serious later on

Sans' use of *oira* in the final Japanese release actually came as two simultaneous shocks. First, it indicated that Toby had indeed given *oira* his stamp of approval. Second, it conflicted with Toby's statement from years earlier that Sans seemed like the type of character to use the pronoun *boku*. As a result of all of this, Sans' pronoun was – and still is – a serious and unique issue among Japanese fans.



日本
過去のトレンドを見る
更新：14時13分

1. モンハンワールド
46,370件のツイート
2. Undertale
65,000件のツイート
3. オイラ
12,298件のツイート
4. 氷点下
5. アンテ
6. アンダーテイル
7. モンハンPS4
8. キャラグッズ入荷情報
9. #DubNation
377,120件のツイート
10. スカイリムVR
11. 佐賀地裁
12. 築５０年の家
13. 神木くん
14. デュラント
15. ファイナルMVP
16. カプコン
17. フロム
12,505件のツイート
18. F-35
19. sansの一人称

東京
過去のトレンドを見る
更新：14時13分

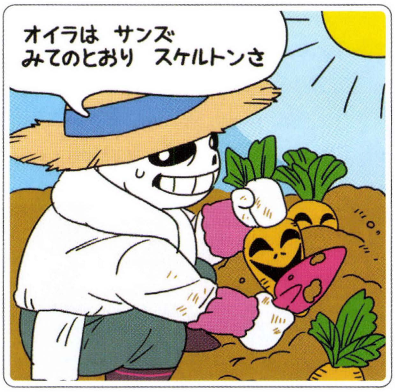
1. モンハンワールド
46,370件のツイート
2. Undertale
65,000件のツイート
3. オイラ
12,298件のツイート
4. 氷点下
5. アンテ
6. アンダーテイル
7. モンハンPS4
8. キャラグッズ入荷情報
9. #DubNation
377,120件のツイート
10. スカイリムVR
11. 佐賀地裁
12. 築５０年の家
13. デュラント
14. ファイナルMVP
15. カプコン
16. フロム
12,505件のツイート
17. F-35
18. sansの一人称
19. フラゲ日

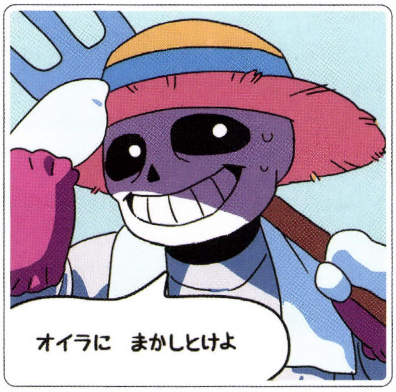
大阪
過去のトレンドを見る
更新：14時13分

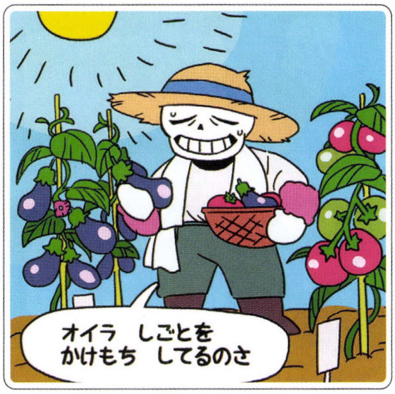
1. モンハンワールド
46,370件のツイート
2. Undertale
65,000件のツイート
3. オイラ
12,298件のツイート
4. 氷点下
5. アンテ
6. アンダーテイル
7. モンハンPS4
8. キャラグッズ入荷情報
9. #DubNation
377,120件のツイート
10. スカイリムVR
11. 佐賀地裁
12. 築５０年の家
13. 神木くん
14. デュラント
15. ファイナルMVP
16. カプコン
17. フロム
12,505件のツイート
18. F-35
19. sansの一人称

Reactions to Sans' use of *oira* made waves online almost immediately – here we see "oira" and "sans' pronoun" trending across all of Japan (left), in Tokyo (middle), and in Osaka (right)

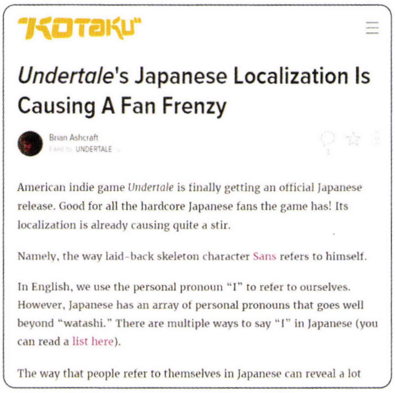
The phrase "Oira Shock" was mostly a joke name that went viral – genuine "shock" events in Japanese include the "Lehman Shock" (the 2008 global financial crisis) and the "Corona Shock" (the rise of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic)


オイラは　サンズ
みてのとおり　スケルトンさ


オイラに　まかしとけよ


オイラ　しごとを
かけもち　してるのさ

The news of Sans' *oira* pronoun led to a deluge of fan art depicting Sans as a country bumpkin or farmer



Undertale's Japanese Localization Is Causing A Fan Frenzy

Brian Ashcraft
Filed to: UNDERTALE

American indie game *Undertale* is finally getting an official Japanese release. Good for all the hardcore Japanese fans the game has! Its localization is already causing quite a stir.

Namely, the way laid-back skeleton character Sans refers to himself.

In English, we use the personal pronoun "I" to refer to ourselves. However, Japanese has an array of personal pronouns that goes well beyond "watashi." There are multiple ways to say "I" in Japanese (you can read a list here).

The way that people refer to themselves in Japanese can reveal a lot

Reports of Japanese fan reactions even hit English-language video game news sites

Oira Shock Reactions

Japanese *Undertale* fans responded with fervor after learning that Sans uses the pronoun *oira* in the official Japanese release. Here are a handful of randomly selected fan comments, translated into English:

> *Guess I'll have to stick with the unofficial translation. Oh, my dear Sans, using* oira...

> *After watching the controversy over Sans' pronoun, I've come to the conclusion that "*oira *Sans" might be pretty cool after all. In fact, maybe Sans could be the leading example of cool guys who use* oira*!*

> *No, this isn't right, Sans can't use* oira*. He's not Sans-like unless he uses* ore.

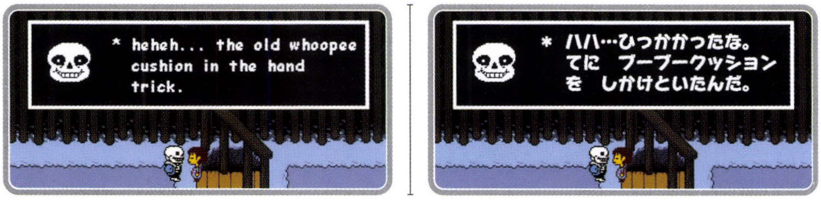
> *That's some good work from the translation team! I think having* oira *as his normal pronoun works great with his personality shift later.*

> *I'm really happy an official translation is being released. But I don't think I'll ever get used to Sans saying* oira

> *At first I was shocked when I learned that he uses* oira*, but after seeing him use it in official screenshots it really clicked with me*

Sans Laughs

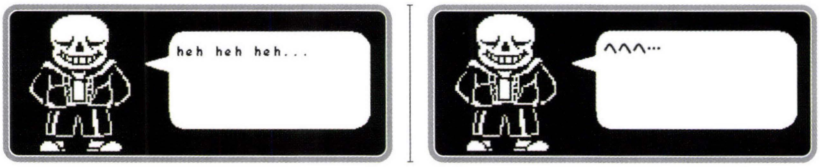
Laughter doesn't always translate perfectly between languages, so localizers sometimes need to adjust the way characters laugh to sound more natural in the target language. As an example, Sans' standard "heheh" laugh in the English script was tweaked on a per-scene basis to match the different moods Toby had intended:



Sans' friendly "heheh" was localized into Japanese with a friendly "haha"

* heheh... the old whoopee cushion in the hand trick.

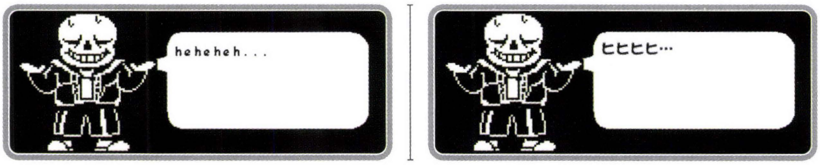
* ハハ…ひっかかったな。
てに ブーブークッション
を しかけといたんだ。



Sans' less friendly "heh heh heh" was left as-is, because it shares the same vibe in tenser scenes

heh heh heh...

ヘヘヘ…



Sans' gleefully dark "heheheh" was localized as "hee hee hee hee" in Japanese to match the tone of the scene

heheheh...

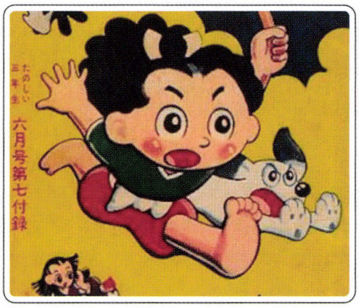
ヒヒヒヒ…

Other characters had their laughter similarly fine-tuned for tone and context too, as we'll continue to see.

Japanese Personal Pronouns: *oira*

Traditionally, the Japanese personal pronoun *oira* suggests that the speaker is from a rural or uncultured area. *Oira* is slowly fading from everyday use, however, and is used far less commonly than pronouns like *watashi, boku,* and *ore.*

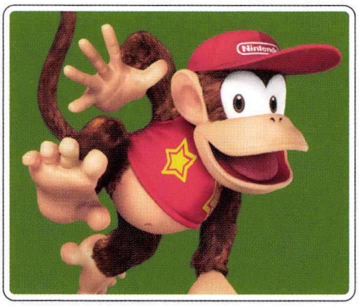
In modern Japanese entertainment, *oira* can still be used to lend characters a rural, unsophisticated vibe, but *oira* is more commonly associated with lovable rascals, rambunctious pranksters, and friendly mascots. Other fictional characters who use *oira* include:


たのしい三年生
六月号第七付録

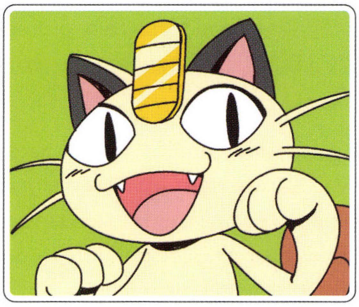
Shishimaru
(*Oira wa Shishimaru*)

Stalkid/Skull Kid
(*The Legend of Zelda* series)

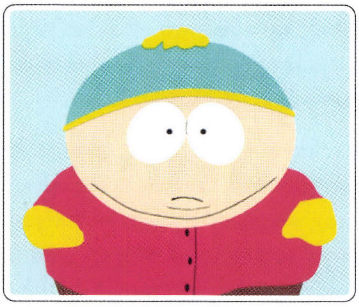
Teba/Atsuo
(*Dragon Quest XI*)



Diddy Kong
(*Donkey Kong Country* series)



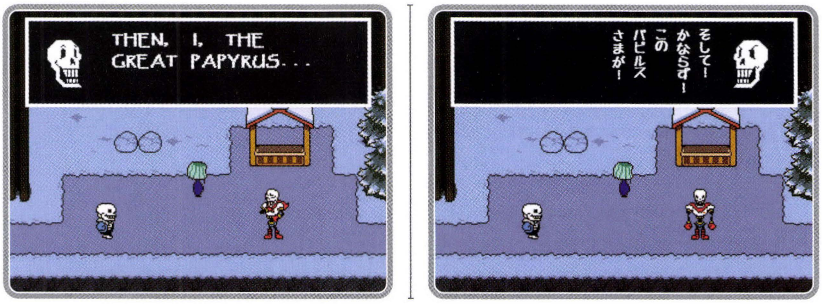
Nyarth/Meowth
(*Pokémon* series, early era only)



Cartman
(*South Park* series)

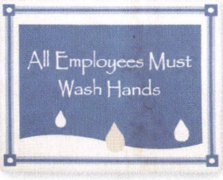
Papyrus Gets Vertical

Papyrus' text box was redesigned for the Japanese localization, although this made his Japanese font smaller than his English font



THEN, I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS...

そして！
かならず！
この
パピルス
さまが！

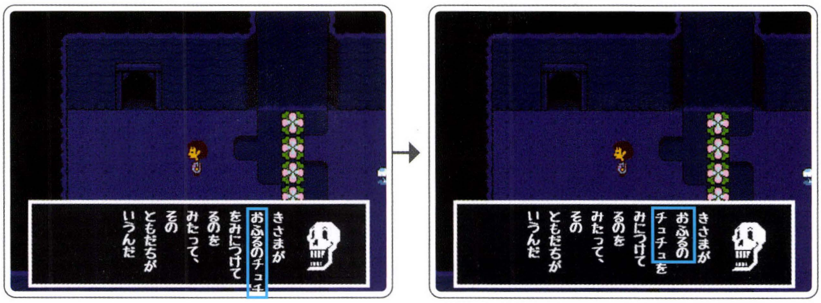


Like Comic Sans, the Papyrus font has a bad reputation for overuse and misuse

Sans has a skeleton brother named Papyrus, whose name is also a reference to a cheesy, overused computer font. Papyrus' English text is unique in two ways: his dialogue uses the Papyrus computer font, and he only uses capital letters. This combination lends his dialogue a humorous "oddball" quality that no other characters in the game share.

Unfortunately, the Papyrus font doesn't support Japanese characters, nor does the Japanese language have capital letters. So, to ensure that Papyrus' text remained visually weird, funny, and memorable in Japanese, 8-4's technical team redesigned Papyrus' dialogue boxes to display text in Japanese *tate* style (vertically from top to bottom, moving right to left) instead of horizontally. The result is immediately striking and reinforces the idea that Papyrus is a happy-go-lucky oddball who's oblivious to the world around him.

Almost every equipment name ("Dusty Tutu" in this example) was too long to fit on one line in Papyrus' Japanese text box, so the programmers added a list of pre-formatted item names specifically for this one line of dialogue



きさまが
おふるのチュチ
をみにつけて
るのを
みたって、
その
ともだちが
いうんだ

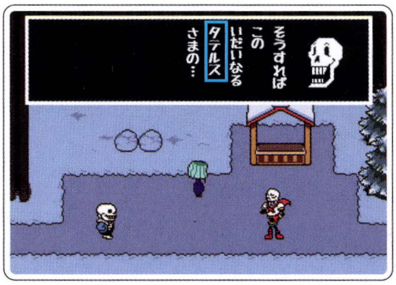
きさまが
おふるの
チュチュを
みにつけて
るのを
みたって、
その
ともだちが
いうんだ

Because *Undertale* wasn't originally designed with vertical text in mind, Papyrus' Japanese text often led to graphical glitches and formatting problems. The localization team fixed this by manually editing all of Papyrus' text to use only five characters per line.

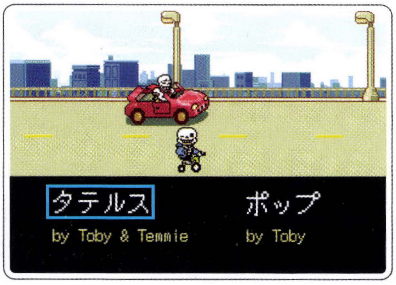
This solution wasn't perfect, though – in one scene, for example, Papyrus states the name of the main character's current equipment. Because most Japanese equipment names are longer than five characters, the equipment name would extend outside Papyrus' text window. The programmers fixed this rare issue by adding a new "Papyrus Equipment Name" list with pre-formatted equipment names.

All in all, it's clear that the localization team put serious effort into preserving Papyrus' Japanese dialogue, translation-wise *and* presentation-wise.

Naming Papyrus



そうすれば
この
いだいなる
タテルス
さまの…



LEFT: Papyrus was called タテルス ("Taterus") for a short time

RIGHT: "Taterus" was reverted much sooner than "Pop", but there was a short time when both names were in the Japanese script

Because Papyrus' text uses the Papyrus font in the English version of *Undertale*, the localization team considered giving Papyrus a new name to match his new Japanese vertical text. Thus, for only a few weeks during the game's localization, Papyrus was known as "Taterus" – a combination of the Japanese word *tate* ("vertical") and "Papyrus". This name didn't last long, however, because it sounded too forced and not very funny.

Even after deciding to keep Papyrus' name as-is, the team faced a new issue: "papyrus" is a foreign word to begin with, so how should Papyrus' Japanese name be pronounced? Should it follow the English pronunciation or the Japanese pronunciation (roughly "pah pee roos")? The team chose the latter.

Vertical Papyrus Reactions

In general, Japanese fans were delightfully surprised by Papyrus' new, vertical text style. Some online responses to the initial reveal included:

> *Papyrus is the only one with vertical text lol*

> *Papryus' vertical text is funny, but the smaller font lessens the impact. His insanely huge font made it sound like he was constantly shouting before.*

> *His vertical text feels very "Japan"*

> *Wow @ Papyrus' text! It's so... avant-garde... or perhaps classical?!*

> *Papyrus' vertical text... It's so adorable!*

> *Papyrus' dialogue is so hard to read now lol! But I like him having vertical text*

> *Papyrus... Nay! He is now Taterus!*

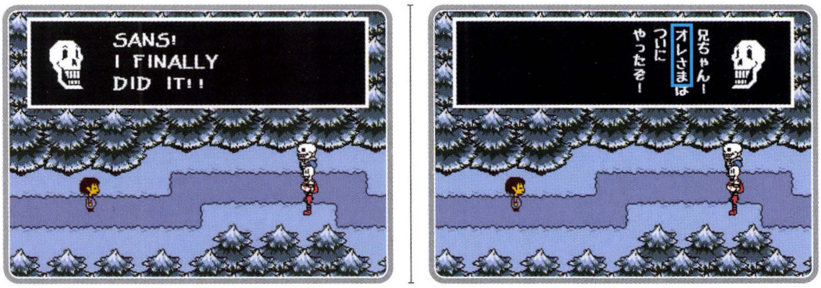
> *I was worried Papyrus would end up sounding like an old-fashioned nerd, but after seeing this I can tell the official Japanese translation is really good*

> *I'm more shocked by Papyrus' vertical text than Sans'* oira

> *Wow... Papyrus' pronoun and speaking style were a surprise. It's a bit different from the unofficial translation, but charming in its own way*

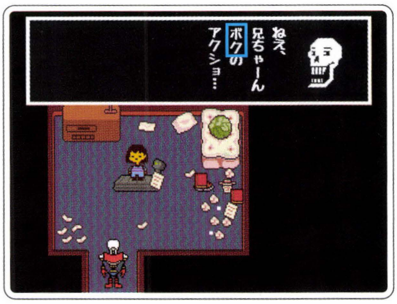
> *Sans' font made sense, but I sure wasn't expecting Papyrus' font rofl*

Papyrus Speaks



Papyrus almost always uses the egotistical personal pronoun オレさま (*ore-sama*) in Japanese

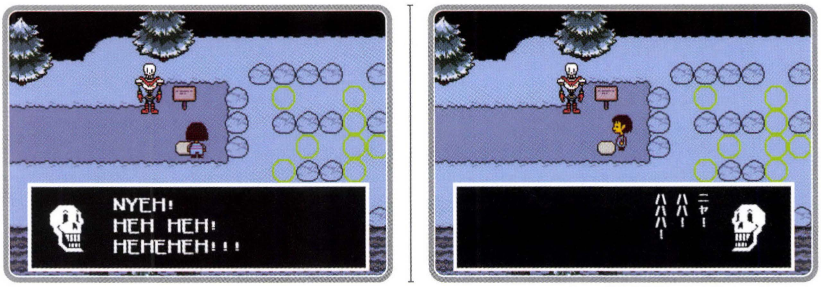
Papyrus is loud, delusional, and thinks very highly of himself. He even refers to himself as "the great Papyrus" in the English script on occasion. The translator replicated this character trait in Japanese by having Papyrus use similar speech patterns. This includes the use of the Japanese pronoun *ore-sama*, which is used by overly pompous characters with "I'm so great!" personalities.



Papyrus uses the pronoun ボク (*boku*) in this rare scene in the Japanese script

Papyrus always uses the pronoun *ore-sama* – except in one scene. If the player enters Sans' room, Papyrus will barge in to ask Sans about an action figure. In this one scene, when Papyrus thinks it's safe to be his true self, he refers to himself as *boku*. This detail adds charm to Papyrus' personality not present in the English line.

Papyrus Laughs



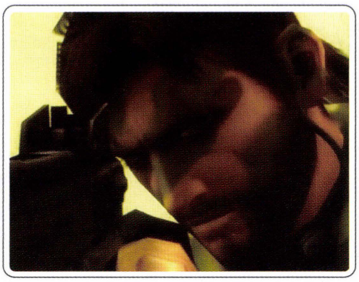
I would've transcribed Papyrus' laugh as ニェヘヘヘ (roughly "nieheheheh") but that's just how localization works – everyone makes different decisions

Papyrus also has a unique laugh in English: "nyehehe". For reasons that are long forgotten, this was finalized as *nyahaha* in Japanese. It's possible that this was done because "nyehehe" can't be transcribed 100% perfectly into Japanese – any transcription would be an approximation at best. Whatever the case may be, Toby approved the choice of Papyrus' Japanese laugh.

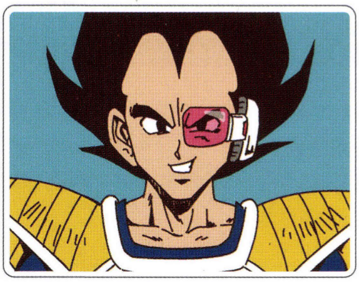
Incidentally, because *nya* also happens to be the sound that cats make in Japanese, some Japanese fans have noted that Papyrus has a cat-like laugh that makes him sound cute.

Japanese Personal Pronouns: *ore*

Ore is another common masculine pronoun in Japanese. It projects a sense of manliness, strength, confidence, being in charge, and/or vulgarity. As such, it's considered a bit crude, and isn't fit for formal situations or when trying to be polite. Among close friends and family, *ore* can instead indicate familiarity. Examples of fictional characters who use *ore* include:

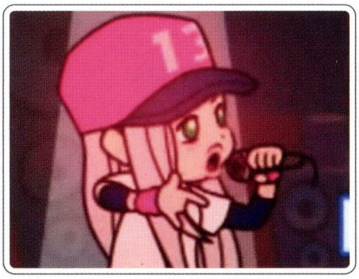


Snake
(*Metal Gear Solid* series)

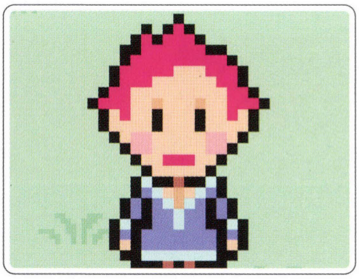


Vegeta
(*Dragon Ball* series)

Ore is primarily a masculine pronoun, but female characters use it on occasion too. This makes them sound tough, manly, and intimidating.

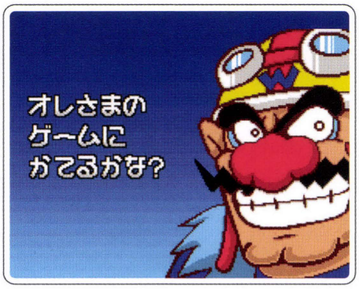


13-Amp
(*WarioWare* series)

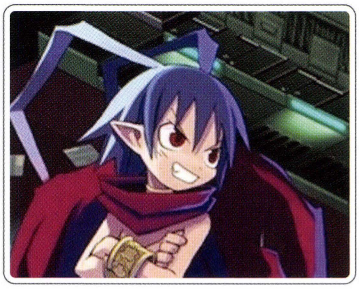


Kumatora
(*MOTHER 3*)

The Japanese name suffix *-sama* normally indicates high respect for someone, so *ore-sama* is often used by fictional characters with big, over-the-top egos. Examples include:



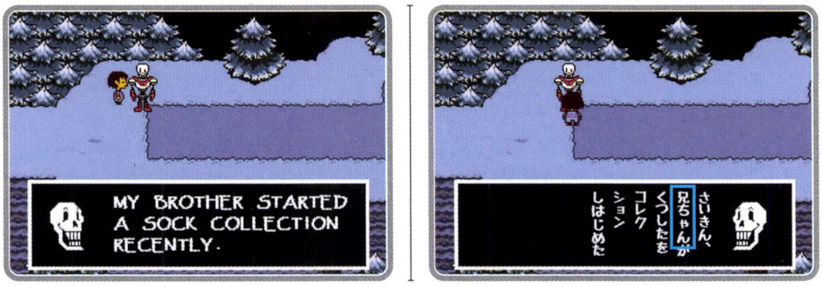
Wario
(Various Nintendo series)



Laharl
(*Disgaea* series)

Sibling Matters

Papyrus refers to Sans as his 兄ちゃん (*nīchan*, "big brother") in Japanese



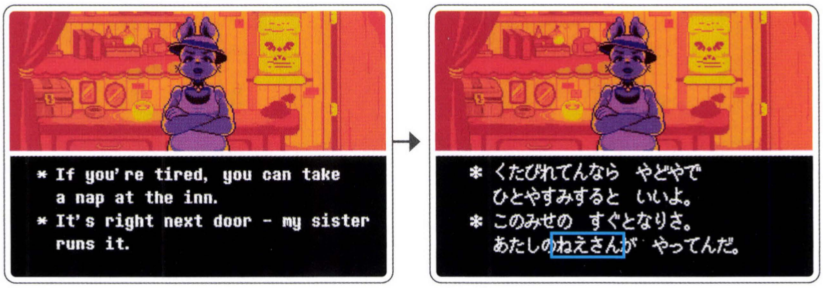
MY BROTHER STARTED A SOCK COLLECTION RECENTLY.

さいきん、兄ちゃんがくつしたをコレクションしはじめた

Sans and Papyrus are brothers, but which is the older brother and which is the younger brother? The English script leaves this unclear – they're simply brothers. What's more, Toby had *intended* for the brothers' relationship to remain unclear.

Unfortunately, the brothers' uncertain relationship presented a major translation problem: there are words for "younger brother" and "older brother" in Japanese, but not for "brother" in general. Rather than make a blind guess, the translator consulted with Toby for details. Thus, through the translation process, it was definitively revealed that Sans is the older brother and Papyrus is the younger brother.

The English script simply says "sister" here, while the Japanese script uses the word ねえさん (*nēsan*, "older sister")



* If you're tired, you can take a nap at the inn.
* It's right next door – my sister runs it.

＊ くたびれてんなら　やどやで
ひとやすみすると　いいよ。
＊ このみせの　すぐとなりさ。
あたしのねえさんが　やってんだ。

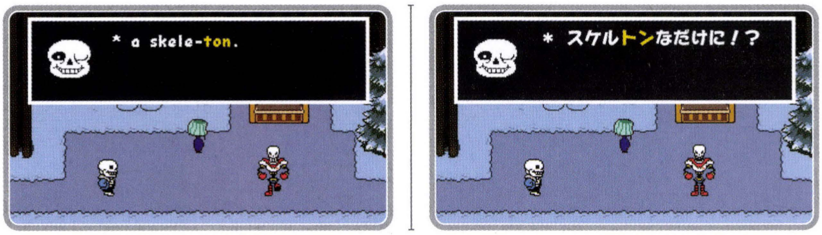
This same relationship issue appeared elsewhere during *Undertale*'s Japanese localization. For example, a store owner mentions that she has a sister who manages the inn. In English, these two are simply referred to as sisters, but the Japanese language only has words for "younger sister" or "older sister".

Again, the translator consulted with Toby to determine their relationship. Toby had never considered how these sisters relate age-wise, so he arbitrarily decided that the store owner is the younger sister and the innkeeper is the older sister.

In short, there are parts of the Japanese script that provide small details not present in the English script – not because anything was intentionally changed, but simply because of how the two languages work.

Sometimes things get lost in translation, but sometimes things become clear in translation too, as *Undertale*'s Japanese localization demonstrates here.

Yet Even More Skeleton Puns



* a skele-ton.

* スケルトンなだけに！？

If there's one thing you learn from this book, hopefully it's that it's hard to be "humerus" in a literal translation

Skeleton jokes begin to flow freely in the English script. Most of these jokes would be lost in a straightforward translation into Japanese, so the translator replaced many of them with jokes that work in Japanese. Examples include:

Original English Pun	Approximate Japanese Localization
hey, take it easy. i've gotten a ton of work done today. a skele-ton.	despite how it looks, work is going *ton-ton* [swimmingly] for me. a skele-ton amount.
wow, sounds like you're really working yourself... down to the bone.	just chill and rest your weary... bones.
As for your work? Put a little more... "backbone" into it!!!!	Ugh... You're really lazy down to the marrow of your bones!
Sans! You are not helping!! You lazybones!	Hey, quit making stuff up! You rotten skeleton!
You are not a dork. You are more of a bonehead.	You are not stupid. Your head is simply empty.

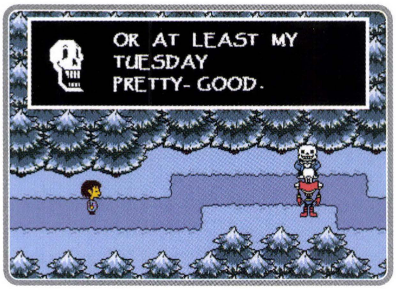
Not every skeleton joke made the jump to Japanese, though – some jokes were reframed to work in a different way, while others were given straightforward translations to avoid sounding forced:

Original English Pun	Approximate Japanese Localization
don't sweat it, kid. I'll keep an eye-socket out for ya.	don't worry, you'll be fine. you can count on me.
There are no skeletons inside my closet!!! Except me sometimes.	There are no monsters in the closet! Just me, sometimes!
So let's let bybones be bybones!	So let's make it all water under the bridge!
Frisk... Take a hike. Hiking is good for your bones.	Frisk... Go get lost. I don't know where "lost" is, so go find it for yourself!

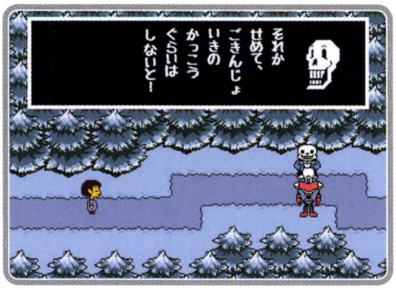
Not all skeleton puns needed to change, however. When Sans says "bone apetit" in English, for example, the same pun already works in Japanese too.

Dressing Up

This text is unique to the No Mercy route, incidentally



OR AT LEAST MY TUESDAY PRETTY-GOOD.



それかせめて、ごきんじょいきのかっこうぐらいはしないと！

Papyrus is intent on making a name for himself by capturing a human. In one scene, he asks:

> *WHEN'S THE HUMAN SHOWING UP??? I WANT TO LOOK MY SUNDAY BEST... OR AT LEAST MY TUESDAY PRETTY-GOOD.*

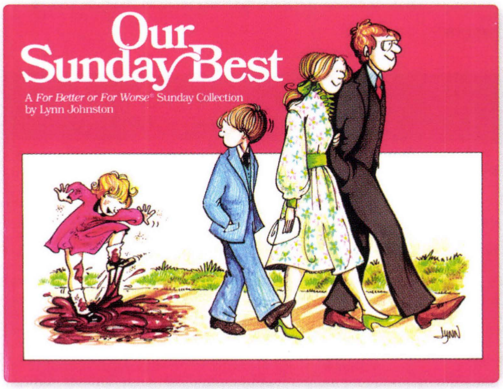
The English phrase "Sunday best" refers to the kind of nice, formal clothing one is expected to wear to church on Sundays. Only about 1% of the Japanese population is Christian, so a literal translation of "Sunday best" wouldn't make much sense, and the made-up "Tuesday pretty-good" would make even less sense.

To work around this cultural barrier, the translator adjusted the line slightly:

> *When's the human getting here? I need to dress in my* yoso-iki [going somewhere formal] *clothes... or at least in my* gokinjo-iki [going somewhere in the neighborhood] *clothes!*

As we can see, the new Japanese text plays with the standard word *yoso-iki* by creating the made-up word *gokinjo-iki*. The end result is a Japanese joke that uses completely different wording to parallel the logic of the original English joke.

Apparently the phrase "Sunday best" has been around since the 1600s – I wonder if we can get Toby's "Tuesday pretty-good" to last for 400 years too


Our Sunday Best
A For Better or For Worse® Sunday Collection
by Lynn Johnston
Lynn

Island
CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

COME AS YOU ARE!

Wear your Sunday best or your favorite pair of jeans.

We believe it's what's on the inside that counts.

Island Christian Fellowship

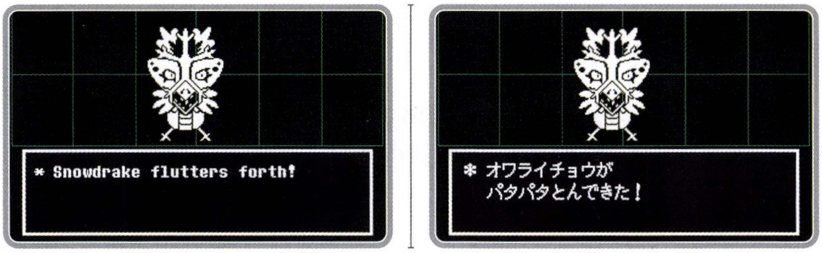
Sunday - 9:30am

[redacted]

Phone: [redacted]

A localization team member explained the goal for Papyrus' text early on: "You can Google a lot of Papyrus's lines and he is the first search result because no one else has ever said anything like it. That's the kind of dialogue we should be striving for with him."

Snowdrake Speaks


* Snowdrake flutters forth!

* オワライチョウが
パタパタとんできた！

Snowdrake's new Japanese name suits him perfectly, although it does change him into a bird

A young comedian monster named Snowdrake gets his name from the English words "snowflake" and "drake", a type of dragon. Toby knew this wordplay might be tough to translate, so he left a note: "you can call him a bird if it makes it easier to make a pun [...] the main thing about him is that he's a comedian".

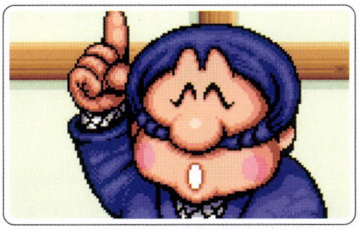
Based on Toby's suggestion, the translator renamed the monster *owaraichō*, a combination of *owarai* ("comedy") and *chō* ("bird"). This name is also a play on the word *raichō* ("rock ptarmigan"), a bird associated with cold, snowy areas.

Raichō are iconic, culturally significant birds in Japan and are associated with deities, mountains, and snow

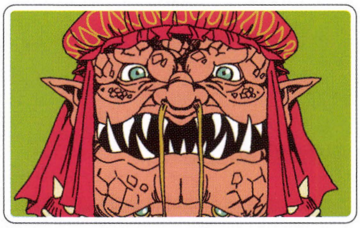
In Japanese, Snowdrake speaks using a dialect associated with Osaka, the comedy capital of Japan. Snowdrake also uses the pronoun *wate*, which reinforces his connection to Osaka-style comedy.

Japanese Personal Pronouns: *wate*

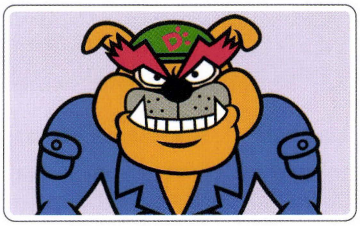
The pronoun *wate* is associated with people from the Osaka region. In entertainment, the Osaka dialect is associated with comedy, commerce, coarseness, and organized crime, among other things. Other fictional characters who use *wate* include:



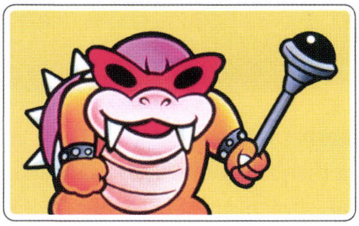
Ebisumaru
(*Mystical Ninja* series)



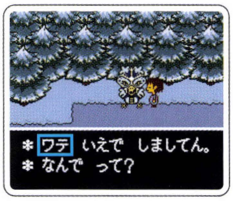
Galactic Merchant Dongoros
(*Chikyū Sentai Fiveman*)



Dribble
(*WarioWare* series)



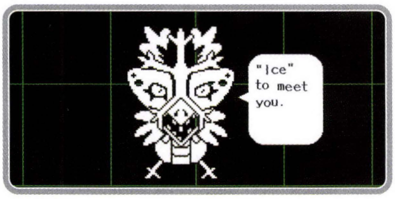
Roy Koopa
(*Super Mario Bros.* series)


* ワテ いえで しましてん。
* なんで って？

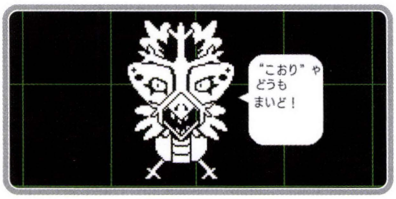
The Japanese pronoun ワテ (*wate*) is less common in everyday Japanese these days, it's another one that's slowly fading away

Snowdrake Comedy Hour

Between Snowdrake's Japanese name, dialect, and puns, it almost feels like this monster is from a Japanese game to begin with!



"Ice"
to meet
you.



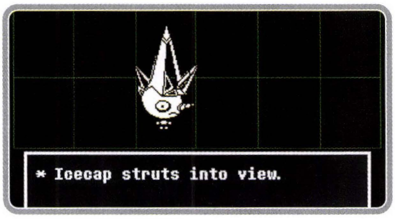
"こおり" や
どうも
まいど！

As a teenage comedian-in-training, Snowdrake makes many snow and ice puns in English. Some English puns didn't need to be changed, but most had to be replaced with Japanese puns instead. Some examples include:

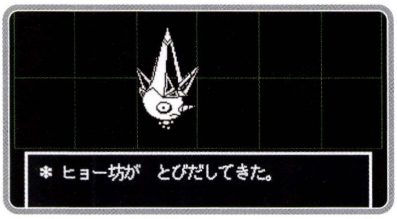
Original English Pun	Approximate Japanese Localization
I ran away from home. Why? 'Cause my father was so "cold" to me...	I ran away from home. Why? Because my dad was "cold" to me.
But she's still my mom. And that's "cool!"	But she's still my mom. We'll "chill" always be family, no matter what!
"Ice" to meet you.	It's "ice" to be here!
Ice puns are "snow" problem	Ice jokes tend to "slip" and fall flat!
Fights you in "cold" blood.	I'm "chilly" gonna hurt you!
Better not snow "flake" out!	There's "snow" way out for you now!
My fave ice cereals: "frosted"	Breakfast? Gotta have that "frosted" cereal!
"Chill" out...	Keep "slippin'" up...
M.. m.. macaroni and "freeze"	Ma... ma... macaroni "freeze" cheese...

Icy What You Did

Icecap's Japanese name plays with the words 帽 (*bō*, "hat; cap") and 坊 (*bō*, "boy; lad")



* Icecap struts into view.



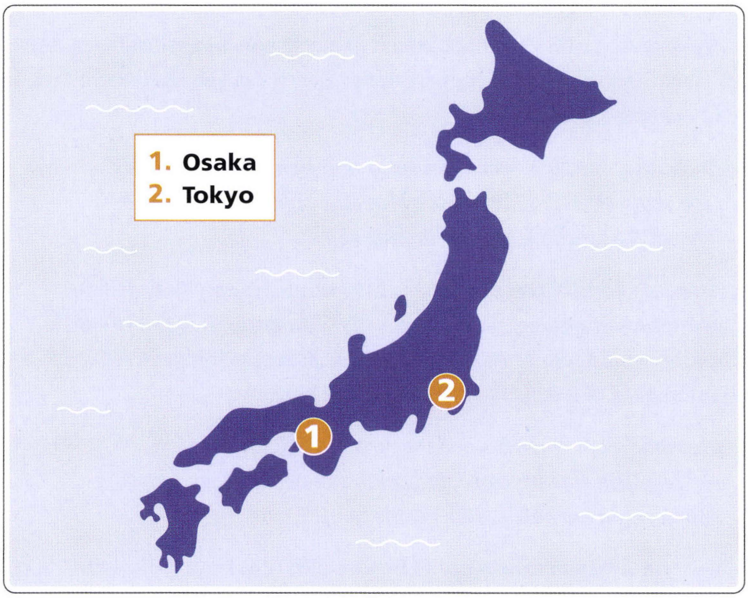
* ヒョー坊が　とびだしてきた。

A monster named "Icecap" sometimes appears in battle. He wears a hat made of ice that he considers his pride and joy. In Japanese, Icecap's name became *hyōbō* – *hyō* means "ice", while *bō* is a play on the Japanese words for "cap" and "boy". This is an interesting, rare example of a name that works perfectly in a straightforward translation. Not only that, the Japanese name naturally contains an extra layer of wordplay not found in the English version.

Eye on Osaka

Osaka is the name of a major city and a prefecture in western Japan. The Osaka metropolitan area is the second largest in Japan, after Tokyo.

In broad terms, Japan can be divided into two cultural halves, with Osaka representing western Japan and Tokyo representing eastern Japan. This division includes language, too – the Japanese dialect associated with Osaka sounds significantly different from the more "standardized" Tokyo dialect.



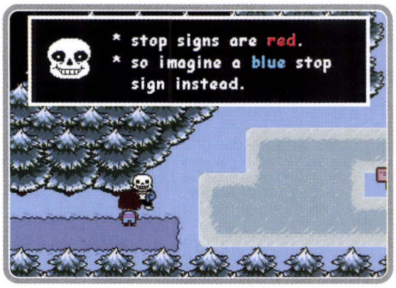
Osaka Castle, first built in 1583, is one of Japan's most famous landmarks

Osaka is home to Dōtonbori, a famous tourist destination and entertainment district

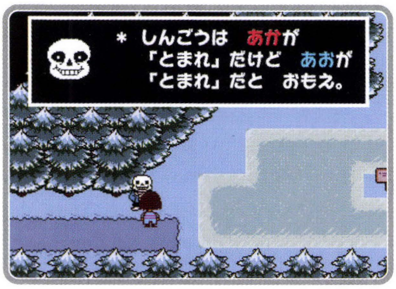
The city of Osaka is rich in culture and history. As a port city and a major financial center, Osaka is associated with commerce, merchants, and shipping. As the comedy capital of Japan, Osaka is where many comedians master their craft before breaking into the mainstream comedy circuit. Osaka is also famous for its food, and is sometimes referred to as "the nation's kitchen".

Stop Right There

In his translation notes, Toby emphasized this gameplay hint is meant to sound "obtuse". Clarification is at the heart of translation, so I find that translating "obtuse" stuff can either be really fun or really nightmarish



* stop signs are red.
* so imagine a blue stop sign instead.



＊ しんごうは　あかが
「とまれ」だけど　あおが
「とまれ」だと　おもえ。

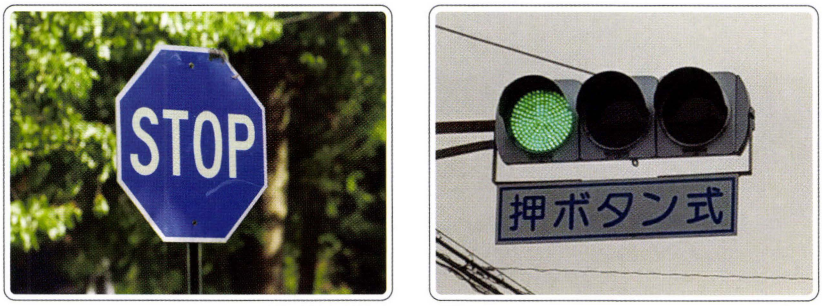
Sans explains that a blue-colored attack in battle won't cause damage if the player remains still. He then suggests a needlessly complicated technique for remembering this fact:

> *imagine a stop sign. when you see a stop sign, you stop, right?*
> *stop signs are red. so imagine a blue stop sign. simple, right?*
> *when fighting, think about blue stop signs.*

Stop signs *are* red in Japan too, so this hint would be easy to translate into Japanese without any major issues. However, the translator felt the information would "click" more naturally in Japanese if it referred to a stoplight instead of a stop sign. Thus the line became:

> *everyone stops when a stoplight turns red, right?*
> *red stoplights mean "stop", but think of blue as "stop", okay?*
> *simple, right? in battle, blue means "stop".*

This new text doesn't really seem to be that different from the original text, but there's a cultural reason behind it: in Japanese, green stoplights are called blue stoplights. And since real-life "blue" stoplights and red stoplights are opposites, it makes sense for Sans to swap the two in his overly complicated explanation.



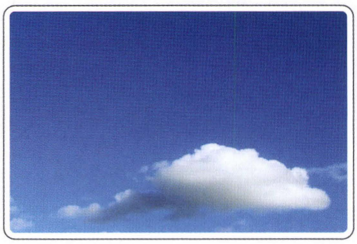
LEFT: English-speaking players are asked to imagine this

RIGHT: Japanese players are asked to imagine this instead

On a slightly different note, this whole blue/green issue is a common challenge when translating between Japanese and English. One time, I had to translate a Japanese anime script without any video to check, so I basically had to guess a color and hope it was right. Later, when I saw the final product, I was relieved to see that my guess was right.

Blue and Green in Japanese

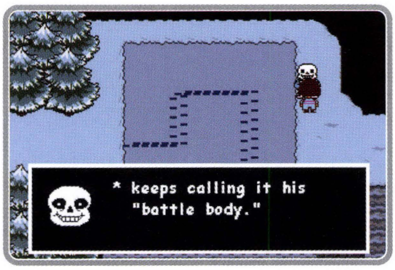
For linguistic and historical reasons, the Japanese word 青 (*ao*) usually means "blue" in English, but can instead mean "green" in some situations. In general, *ao* means "green" when referring to plants, fruits, vegetables, and other types of "vibrant" green. *Ao* can also mean "green" in relation to other things, including stoplights and being new to something.



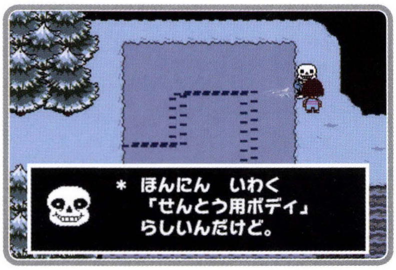
This sky is *ao* in Japanese

These chili peppers are also *ao* in Japanese

Mega Mail



* keeps calling it his
"battle body."



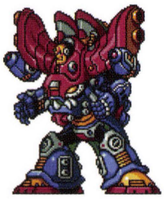
* ほんにん　いわく
「せんとう用ボディ」
らしいんだけど。

Game theory: does the *Mega Man* series exist in the *Undertale* universe?

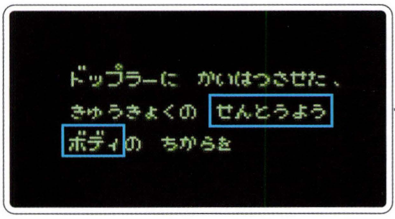
Sans shares inside information about Papyrus' unusual clothing. In English, he says:

> *we made that a few weeks ago for a costume party. he hasn't worn anything else since... keeps calling it his "battle body."*

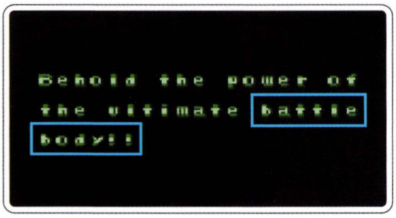
Toby noted that the term "battle body" is a direct reference to Sigma's "battle body" in *Mega Man X3*. The translator checked the original Japanese version of *Mega Man X3*, found that it used the term *sentōyō bodi* ("body for combat use"), and then used that term in the Japanese *Undertale* script.



Toby borrowed the term "battle body" from *Mega Man X3*, but Papyrus' costume *isn't* based on Sigma's battle body



ドップラーに かいはつさせた、
きゅうきょくの せんとうよう
ボディの ちからを

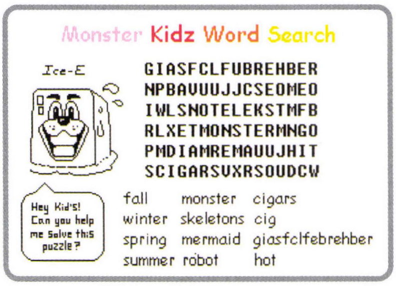


Behold the power of
the ultimate battle
body!!

This obscure reference is easy enough to miss in the English script. So without Toby's input, it probably would've been missed in translation too.

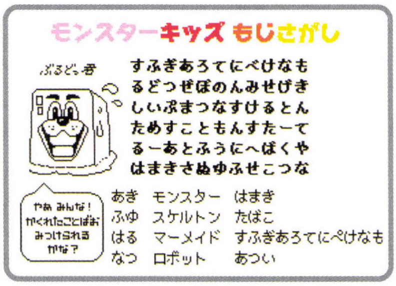
Searching for Words

Reader Challenge #3: Solve both word searches and see how their solutions are different



GIASFCLFUBREHBER
NPBAVUUJJCSEOMEO
IWLSNOTELEKSTMFB
RLXETMONSTERMNGO
PMDIAMREMAVUJHIT
SCIGARSVXRSOUDCW

fall
winter
spring
summer
monster
skeletons
mermaid
robot
cigars
cig
giasfclfebrehber
hot


モンスターキッズ もじさがし
ぶるどっ君
やあ みんな！ かくれたことばお みつけられる かな？

すふぎあろてにべけなも
るどつぜぼのんみせげき
しいぶまつなすけるとん
ためすこともんすたーて
るーあとふうにへばくや
はまきさぬゆふせこつな

あき
ふゆ
はる
なつ
モンスター
スケルトン
マーメイド
ロボット
はまき
たばこ
すふぎあろてにぺけなも
あつい

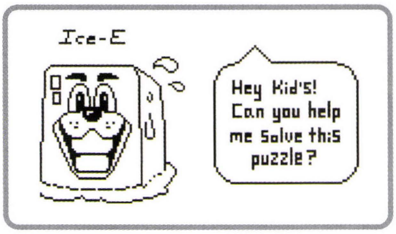
Papyrus plants a trap to stall the main character's progress: a word search puzzle intended for children.

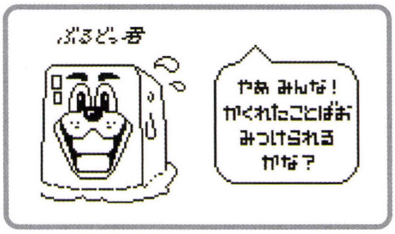
The English word search puzzle features one nonsense word and eleven normal words for the player to find. Some of the words are related to smoking because the puzzle's in-game creator loves to smoke.

Just like the English word search, the Japanese word search features one nonsense word and eleven normal words as well. However, the Japanese word search has been resized and contains fewer total letters. Because of this, the English solutions and the Japanese solutions don't match.

Breaking the Ice

The more I look, the more it seems like the *Duck Hunt* dog's face is stuck on an ice cube



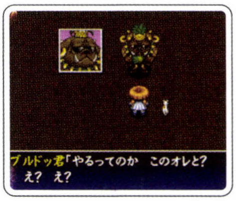


In English, the word search puzzle is presented by a dog-faced ice cube mascot named "Ice-E", a play on the word "icy". A text bubble also includes a message from Ice-E:

> *Hey, kid's! Can you help me solve this puzzle?*

In Japanese, the mascot was renamed *Burudokkun*, which is also a play on words. *Buru* is the Japanese sound effect for shivering, the name ends with the friendly name suffix *-kun*, and the name resembles the word *burudoggu*, the Japanese word for "bulldog".

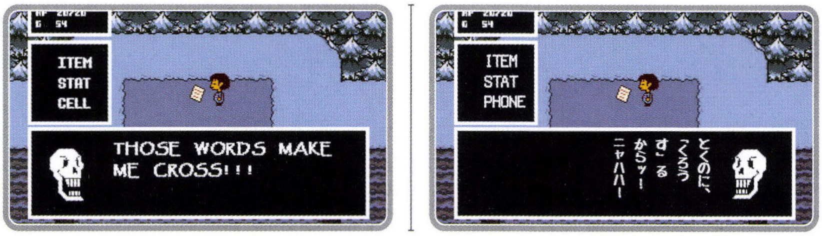
Ice-E's Japanese text bubble closely matches what he says in English. It even emulates the "kid's" apostrophe mistake in the English message by including a basic Japanese grammar mistake: using the character お (*o*) when を (*o*) should be used. With these two changes, the translator was able to keep the Japanese version of Ice-E an ice-themed mascot with an ice-themed name, saying something with bad grammar.



ブルドッ君「やるってのか　このオレと?
え?　え?

Random trivia: there's a bulldog character in *Shiren the Wanderer 4* (Nintendo DS, 2010) also called *Burudokkun* in Japanese, but it's just a coincidence

Crossing the Line



THOSE WORDS MAKE ME CROSS!!!

とくのに、「くろうす」るからッ！ニャハハー

In my experience, puns are generally easier to localize between Japanese and English when they involve a foreign loan word, such as in this scene

Papyrus shares his disgust for crossword puzzles by saying:

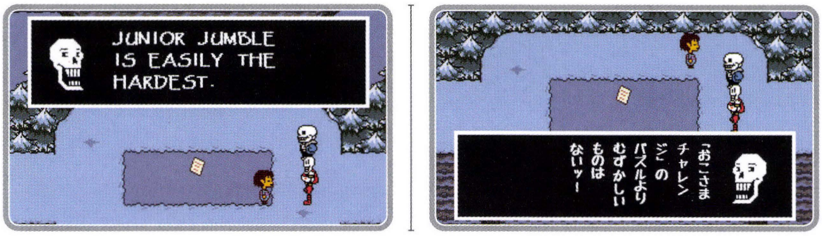
> *HMM... CROSSWORD. I GUESS IT'S AN APT NAME. THOSE WORDS MAKE ME CROSS!!!*

The English word "crossword" exists in the Japanese language, so the translator localized this pun by playing with the Japanese words *kurosu* ("cross") and *kurōsuru* ("to struggle with"). As a result, Papyrus now says in Japanese:

> *HMM... CROSSWORD... THAT'S A GOOD NAME. BECAUSE I ESPECIALLY STRUGGLE WITH THEM! NYAHAHA!*

As we can see, the new Japanese line parallels the English line's tone and humor.

Jumbled Up



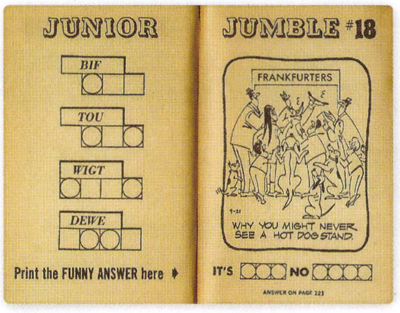
JUNIOR JUMBLE IS EASILY THE HARDEST.

「おこさまチャレンジ」のパズルよりむずかしいものはないッ！

In a way, *Junior Jumble* seems fitting for skeletons, as they're basically a jumble of bones themselves

Sans and Papyrus argue about word puzzles. In English, Sans prefers crossword puzzles, while Papyrus prefers *Junior Jumble*, a real-life puzzle series aimed at children.

To make this reference work in Japanese, the translator replaced *Junior Jumble* with *Okosama Challenge* ("Junior Challenge"), which is a parody of the real-life children's activity book *Kodomo Challenge* ("Child Challenge").



JUNIOR JUMBLE #18

BIF
TOU
WIGT
DEWE

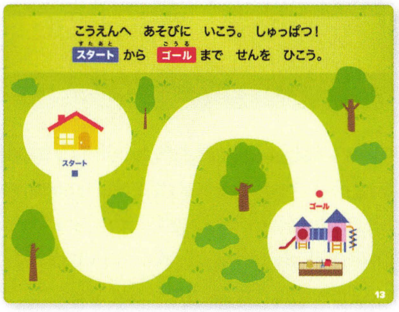
Print the FUNNY ANSWER here

FRANKFURTERS

WHY YOU MIGHT NEVER SEE A HOT DOG STAND.

IT'S ☐☐☐ NO ☐☐☐☐

ANSWER ON PAGE 123



こうえんへ　あそびに　いこう。　しゅっぱつ！

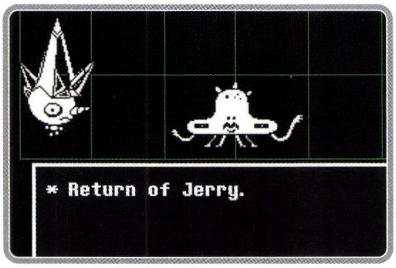
スタート から　ゴール まで　せんを　ひこう。

LEFT: Each *Junior Jumble* puzzle involves a clue, a drawing, and a word scramble

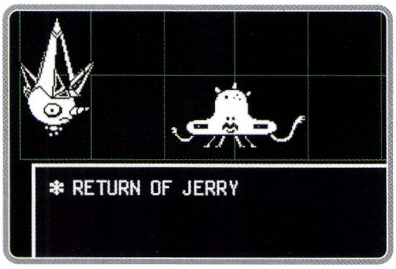
RIGHT: *Kodomo Challenge* puzzles are designed as supplementary educational materials, but are easier than *Junior Jumble* puzzles

A Link to the Past

This is an interesting example of how the solution to a localization problem is sometimes to change nothing at all!



* Return of Jerry.

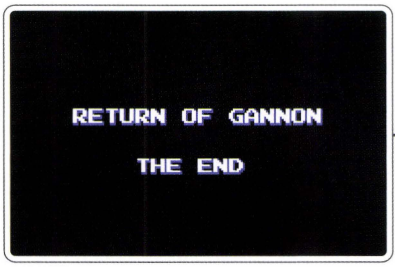


* RETURN OF JERRY

A monster named Jerry is so annoying in battle that the player can team up with other enemies to "ditch" him. After several turns, however, Jerry will show up and annoy everyone again.

In the English script, Jerry's arrival is accompanied by the text "Return of Jerry". Toby noted that this is a reference to the classic 1988 game, *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*. Specifically, it's a reference to the game over screen, which includes the text "RETURN OF GANON".

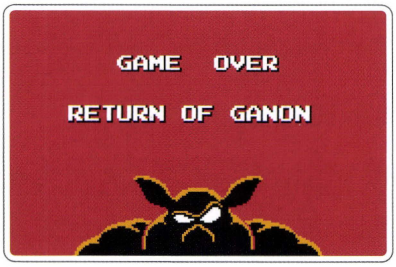
You know what, the "Gannon" name should make a return someday, like maybe he'd be a copycat Ganon and the main villain in a spinoff game, but with everything slightly off about him



RETURN OF GANNON

THE END

Zelda II game over screen (Japanese)



GAME OVER

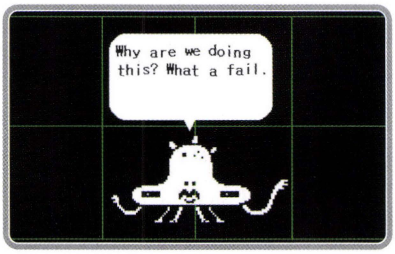
RETURN OF GANON

Zelda II game over screen (English)

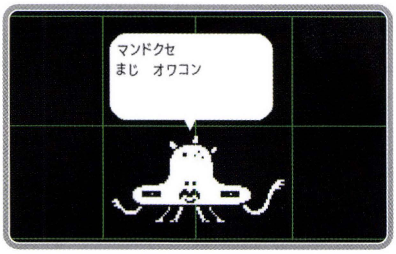
The original Japanese version of *Zelda II* had a similar, English-language game over message: "RETURN OF GANNON". To retain this reference, the translator left "RETURN OF JERRY" entirely in English in the Japanese *Undertale* script.

Jerry Speaks

The translator also had to account for Jerry's unique text balloon, which appears above him and can't hold as much text as the standard text balloon



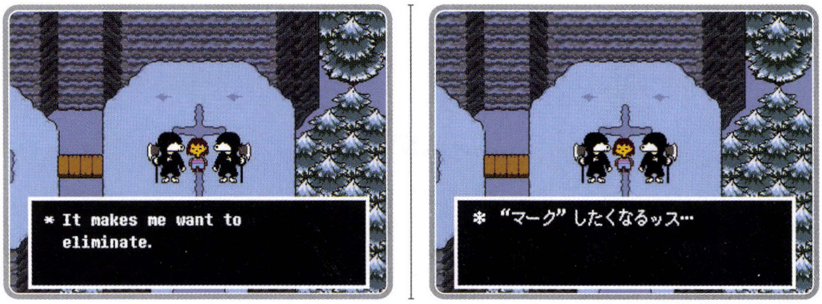
Why are we doing this? What a fail.



マンドクセ
まじ　オワコン

Toby designed Jerry to speak in an outdated and "irritating meme-y" way in English. To preserve this character trait in Japanese, the translator dropped all of the original English text and replaced it with roughly similar Japanese Internet slang that feels outdated and annoying. Jerry also tends to use the assertive and masculine Japanese pronoun *ore*.

Waste Management



* It makes me want to eliminate.

* “マーク”したくなるッス…

Without extra notes and context, I could absolutely see a rushed translator mistranslating this rarer usage of "eliminate"

Two married guard dogs block the way. The dogs can smell that a human is nearby, but can't quite find the source of the smell. The dogs, named Dogamy and Dogaressa, converse before battling the human:

> Dogamy: *Hmmm... Here's that weird smell. It makes me want to eliminate.*
>
> Dogaressa: *(... Eliminate YOU!)*

In English, the word “eliminate” usually means “to get rid of something” or even “to kill”, but in some contexts – such as when discussing physiology or animal training – it can mean “to expel waste matter from the body”. Toby made sure to mention this double meaning in his translation notes.

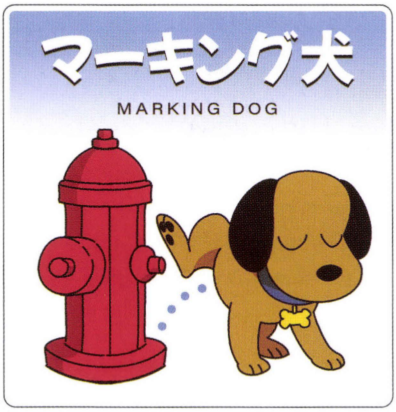
At first, the translator localized this wordplay by referring to bombs:

> Dogamy: *Here's the source of the smell. It makes me want to drop a “bomb”.*
>
> Dogaressa: *(... We'll drop a “bomb” on you!)*

However, these “bomb” references didn't match the dogs' axe-themed attacks in battle, and they suggested that the dogs wanted to defecate on the main character. So the translator tried a different solution:

> Dogamy: *Here's the source of the smell... It makes me want to “mark” it.*
>
> Dogaressa: *(...“Mark” you, that is!)*

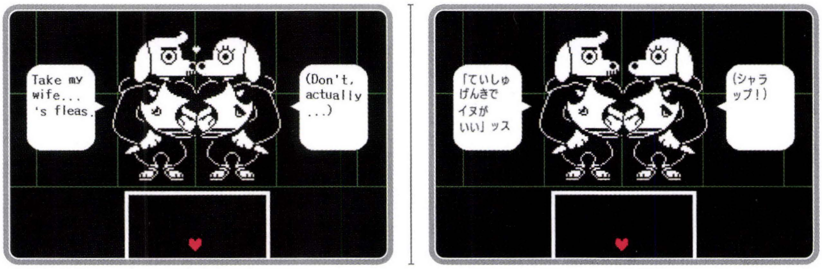
As we can see, the word “eliminate” was simply replaced with the word “mark”. In both English and in Japanese, the word “mark” can mean “to identify as a target” and, in the context of animals, “to mark one's territory with urine, feces, or other bodily substances”. With this second localization solution, the translator was able to preserve the original joke in a way that avoided thematic conflicts.



The English word "marking", as it relates to animal behavior, is already a part of the Japanese language

Canine Clowning

We've seen how easy it is for things to get lost in translation, so this line's localization is a truly impressive feat!


Take my wife... 's fleas.
(Don't, actually ...)
「ていしゅ げんきで イヌが いい」ッス
(シャラップ!)

During the battle against the two lovey-dovey guard dogs, Dogamy says:

> *Take my wife...'s fleas.*

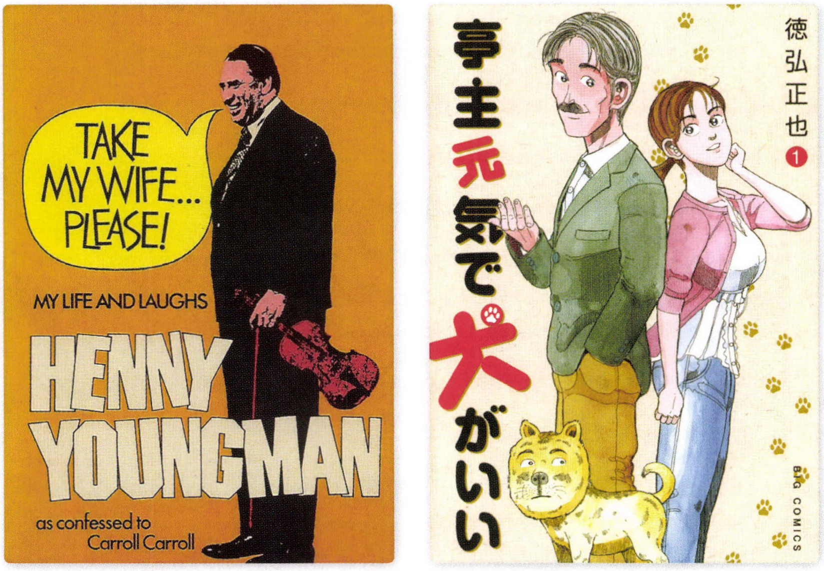
This is a parody of a classic joke by Henny Youngman that has remained in the public consciousness for nearly a century:

> *I can never understand women. Now, take my wife... please!*

In other words, the original English line contains a joke and a reference, is marriage-themed, and involves dogs.

LEFT: Dogamy's English line is a reference to a 1930s joke

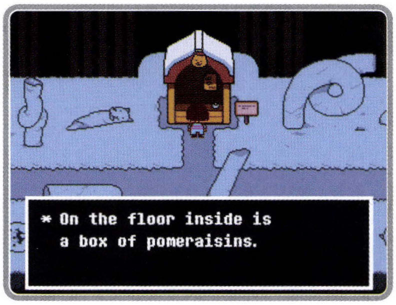
RIGHT: Dogamy's Japanese line is a reference to a 2010s manga about a wife whose husband reincarnates as a dog, and together they solve crimes


TAKE MY WIFE... PLEASE!
MY LIFE AND LAUGHS
HENNY YOUNGMAN
as confessed to Carroll Carroll
亭主元気で犬がいい
徳弘正也
1
BIG COMICS

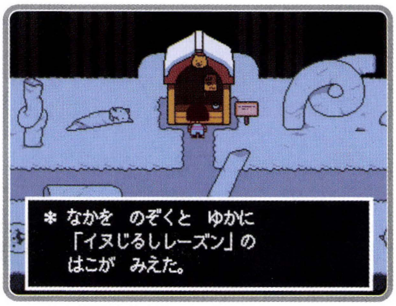
This multi-layered line of dialogue would be flattened in a literal translation into Japanese, so the translator replaced the original reference with the Japanese phrase *teishu genki de inu ga ii* ("it's good to have a husband who is healthy and a dog"). This new phrase is a reference to a Japanese manga series of the same name *and* is a play on the idiom *teishu genki de rusu ga ii* ("it's good to have a husband who is healthy and away").

By replacing the original reference, the translator was able to preserve every layer of meaning found in Dogamy's English line. In other words, the Japanese line also contains a joke and a reference, is marriage-themed, and involves dogs.

Raisin Brand



* On the floor inside is
a box of pomeraisins.



＊ なかを　のぞくと　ゆかに
「イヌじるしレーズン」の
はこが　みえた。

They don't train you for raisin puns in translation school, you just have to master it on your own for some raisin

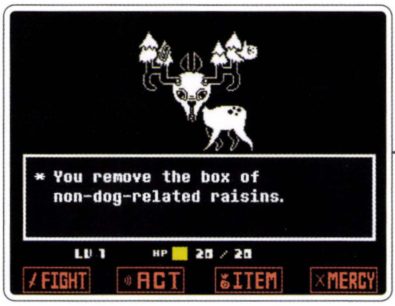
A sentry station belonging to a guard dog is empty, except for a strange box of raisins. The English script refers to this box as a "box of pomeraisins", a play on the words "Pomeranian" and "raisin".

This is a non-raisin-related Pomeranian

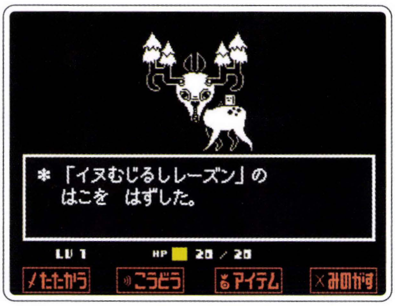
Although the words "Pomeranian" and "raisin" exist in Japanese too, the "ra" parts are pronounced differently:

- The "ra" in "Pomeranian" is pronounced like "rah" in Japanese
- The "ra" in "raisin" is pronounced like "reh" in Japanese

The localization team debated whether or not to keep this slightly broken Japanese wordplay as-is, even with the inconsistent vowel sounds. The team eventually chose the name *inu jirushi rēzun* ("dog-labeled raisins") to ensure that players will know exactly what the item is.



* You remove the box of
non-dog-related raisins.



＊ 「イヌむじるしレーズン」の
はこを　はずした。

The original "pomeraisin" pun probably would've worked pretty well in Japanese, but the localization team went with a different approach

This "pomeraisin" issue comes up one other time in the English script, when un-decorating a monster named Gyftrot:

> *You remove the box of non-dog-related raisins.*

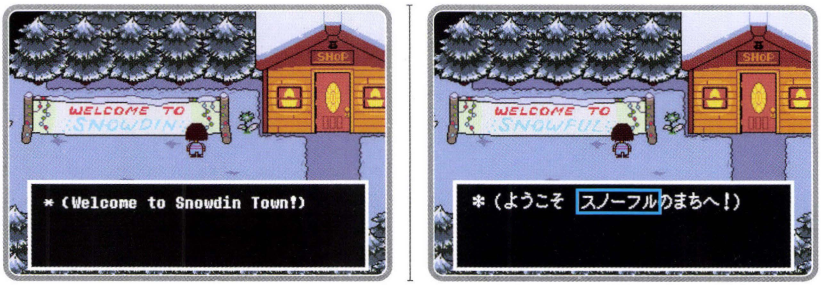
Because this is a box of raisins rather than a box of pomeraisins, the Japanese line became:

> *You removed the box of "non-dog-labeled raisins".*

Understandably, the choice to remove the original Pomeranian/raisin joke surprised some Japanese players, particularly those already familiar with the English script.

Snow Much Fun

"Snowful" is an example of how a single name change can lead to a domino effect that requires a variety of other changes in other places



* (Welcome to Snowdin Town!)

＊ (ようこそ スノーフルのまちへ！)

The first town in *Undertale* is known as "Snowdin" in the English script. Toby chose this name for several reasons:

- It's a play on the phrase "snowed in"
- It allows the inn to be called "Snowed Inn", another play on "snowed in"
- The "din" part at the end gives it a town-like feeling

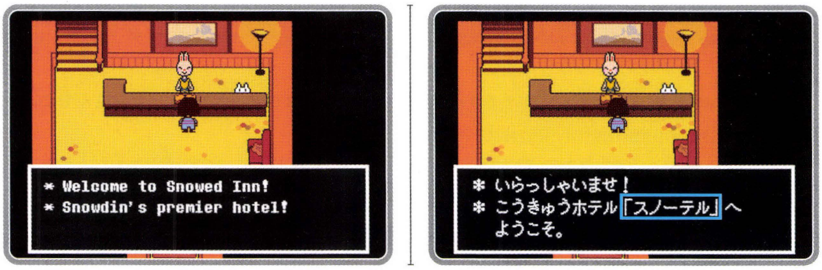
Because this "Snowdin" name carries extra meanings that would be lost in Japanese, the localization team renamed the town "Snowful". This new name seems like an arbitrary change at first, but it offered its own unique wordplay:

- Japanese players would recognize the play on the words "snow" and "full"
- In Japanese, "Snowful" is written *sunōfuru*, a combination of the English word "snow" and the Japanese verb *furu* ("to rain/snow/fall from the sky")

This small localization change required more work than one might expect, however, as the town's welcome sign exists as part of the game's map data rather than the game's text data. The programmer had to account for this to ensure that the proper sign is loaded based on the user's language preference.

Get Inn or Get Out

Reader Challenge #4: Come up with an alternate name for the "Snowed Inn" that retains the snowy theme and contains a pun!

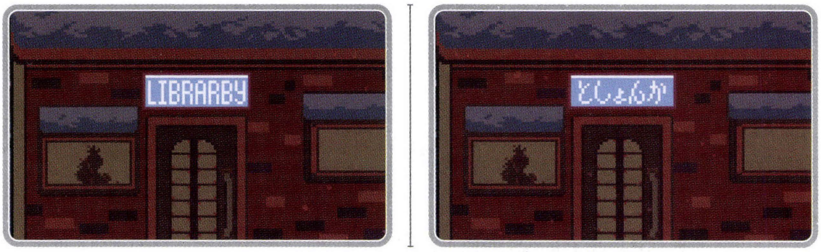


* Welcome to Snowed Inn!
* Snowdin's premier hotel!

＊ いらっしゃいませ！
＊ こうきゅうホテル「スノーテル」へ
ようこそ。

In the English version of *Undertale*, Snowdin's inn is aptly named the "Snowed Inn". Toby knew this pun would likely be lost in translation, so he suggested an alternative name: "Snowtel". The translator agreed that this combination of the English words "snow" and "hotel" would be more recognizable to Japanese players. However, this change also meant that that English-speaking players and Japanese-speaking players would know the same place by a different name.

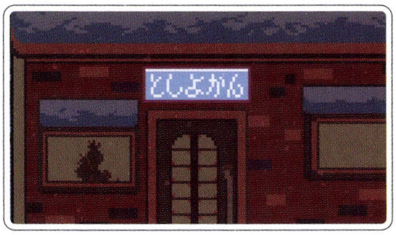
Overdue-ing It



Similar to the "Snowdin" town sign, the localization team had to add extra programming to make this sign switch between English and Japanese based on the player's language setting

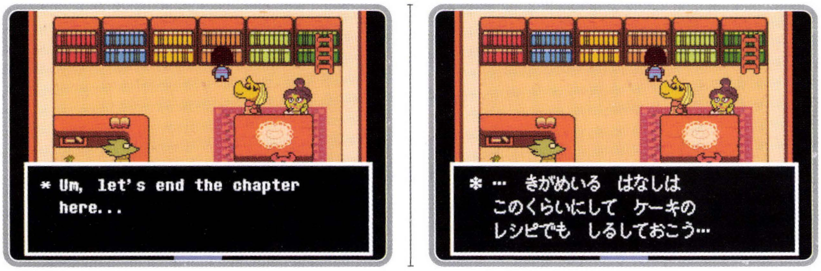
Snowdin's library is denoted by a large sign that says "LIBRARBY". This is a simple, childish misspelling of the English word "library" that some hasty players might not notice immediately. To achieve the same effect in Japanese, the localizers replaced the misspelled English sign with a similarly misspelled Japanese sign. Instead of としょかん (*toshokan*, "library"), the new sign says としょんか (*toshonka*), a hilariously bad misspelling that means nothing.

Originally, the Japanese version of this sign said としよかん (*toshiyokan*), which isn't a real word either. The misspelling was less blatant than "LIBRARBY" though, so it was changed a few months before *Undertale*'s Japanese release.



The library sign used to say としよかん (*toshiyokan*) instead of としょんか (*toshonka*), both are nonsense words though

Making History



* Um, let's end the chapter here...

＊… きがめいる はなしは
このくらいにして ケーキの
レシピでも しるしておこう…

This Japanese line is a good example of an external influence changing a translation, just as we saw back in the "What is Localization?" chapter

Several books in the library reveal the Underground's dark history. One book begins to discuss death and murder, then suddenly ends with:

> *Um, let's end the chapter here...*

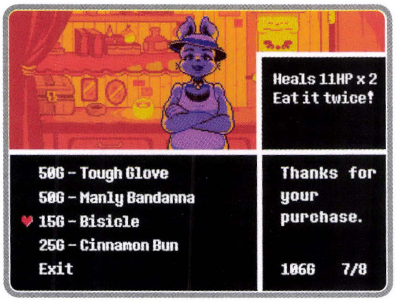
Toby noted that this is the author avoiding the subject of "gruesome death". He then suggested that it might be funnier in Japanese if the author changed the subject by sharing a recipe instead. Thus the same line in Japanese says:

> ... *Perhaps I should set this depressing topic aside and share a cake recipe instead...*

In short, the Japanese version of this line differs from the original English line. Not because anything would be lost in translation, but because of Toby himself.

Double the Dessert

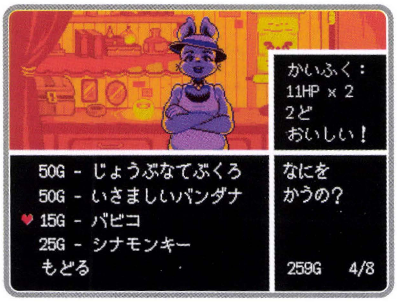
"Popsicle" is one of those weird words that's technically a brand name, but has transformed over time into a general-use word



Heals 11HP x 2
Eat it twice!

Thanks for your purchase.

50G - Tough Glove
50G - Manly Bandanna
15G - Bisicle
25G - Cinnamon Bun
Exit
106G 7/8



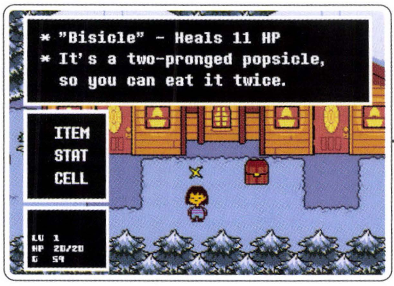
かいふく：
11HP × 2
2ど
おいしい！

なにを
かうの？

50G - じょうぶなてぶくろ
50G - いさましいバンダナ
15G - バビコ
25G - シナモンキー
もどる
259G 4/8

A food item called the "Bisicle" is available for purchase in Snowdin. In English, the item is described as a "two-pronged popsicle, so you can eat it twice".

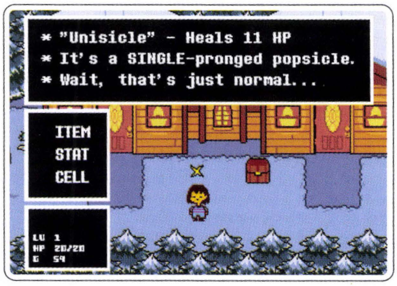
Normally, a food item disappears after being used, but the Bisicle becomes the "Unisicle" after one use. As we can see, there's wordplay at work here: the two item names sound like the words "bicycle" and "unicycle", while also sounding like the word "popsicle".



* "Bisicle" - Heals 11 HP
* It's a two-pronged popsicle,
so you can eat it twice.

ITEM
STAT
CELL
LV 1
HP 20/20
G 59

The Bisicle item before being used



* "Unisicle" - Heals 11 HP
* It's a SINGLE-pronged popsicle.
* Wait, that's just normal...

ITEM
STAT
CELL
LV 1
HP 20/20
G 59

The Bisicle item after being used

This wordplay would be lost in a literal translation into Japanese, so the translator compensated by referring to a different, but similar Japanese ice cream treat known as "Papico". Papico packages generally contain two plastic, ice cream-filled bottles. And just like double popsicles, they're designed to be broken apart and eaten separately or shared with someone else.

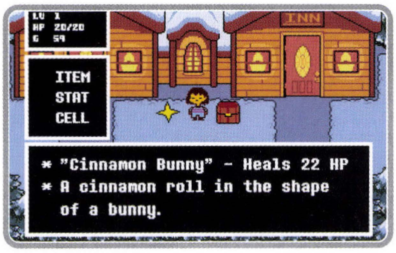
Glico
papico
パピコ チョココーヒー

LEFT: A "two-pronged" popsicle

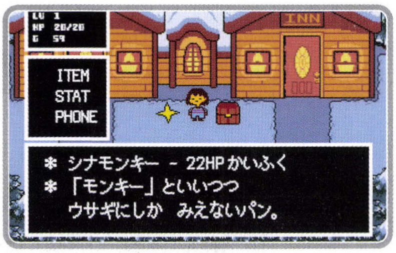
RIGHT: A "two-pronged" Papico ice cream treat

However, because "Papico" is a trademarked name in Japan, the translator chose a parody name rather than a direct reference. Thus the original "Bisicle" and "Unisicle" items are known as the "Babico" and "Single Babico" in Japanese.

Cinnamon Challenge



* "Cinnamon Bunny" - Heals 22 HP
* A cinnamon roll in the shape of a bunny.



* シナモンキー - 22HPかいふく
* 「モンキー」といいつつ ウサギにしか みえないパン。

◂ Under normal circumstances, the CinnaBun's new Japanese name would've resulted in different fan art from Japanese fans, but the new item description nullifies this side effect

A "CinnaBun" item is available in Snowdin, but it turns out its name *isn't* an abbreviation for "Cinnamon Bun":

> *"Cinnamon Bunny"*
> *Heals 22 HP. A cinnamon roll in the shape of a bunny.*

Basically, the item's name and description form a multi-layered joke:

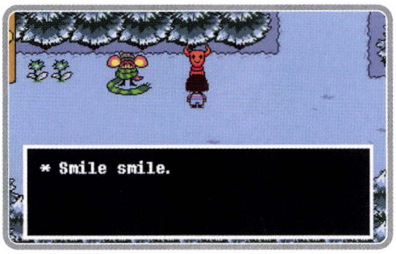
1. Most players will assume "CinnaBun" stands for "Cinnamon Bun" at first
2. But it turns out that "Bun" actually stands for "bunny"
3. Even though "Bun" means "bunny", the item *is* a cinnamon bun after all

The translator localized this joke by changing the item's name and description:

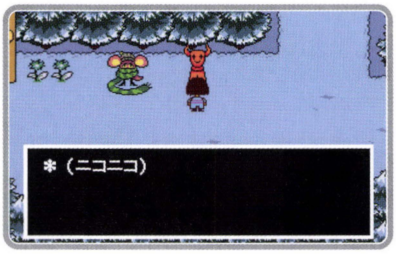
> *"Cinnamonkey"*
> *Heals 22 HP. Despite the "monkey" in its name, it's a bun that clearly looks like a bunny.*

As we can see, this "Cinnamonkey" name parallels the English "CinnaBun" name by tricking the player into assuming something about the item, then using the item's description to throw that assumption out the window.

Smiling Carefully

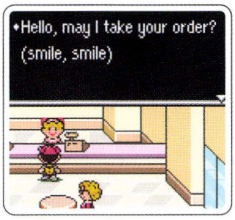


* Smile smile.



* (ニコニコ)

◂ As a translator, I find that the shorter a reference is, the harder it becomes to recognize it



•Hello, may I take your order?
(smile, smile)

▴ Preserving obscure references is always a tough call in localization – after all, when does "obscure" become "unrecognizable"?

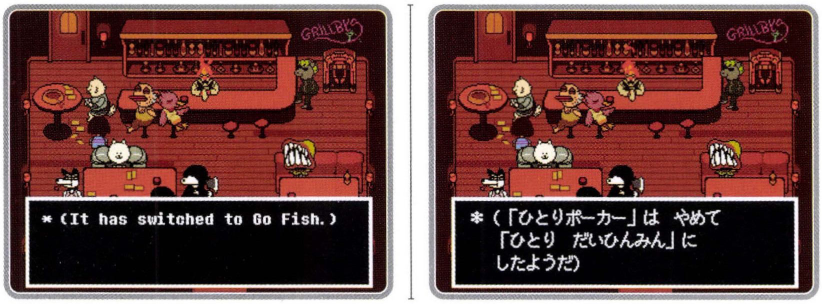
A character in Snowdin discusses why smiling is important. Talking to this character a second time in the English version results in the text:

> *Smile smile.*

Toby noted that this short line is actually a quote from *EarthBound*. The translator used this information to preserve the *EarthBound* reference in the Japanese script, but noted that because the *EarthBound* quote is even more unremarkable in Japanese, the reference would be lost in translation.

Playing With a Full Deck

This scene is a parody of the famous *Dogs Playing Poker* painting, which is known in Japan too



* (It has switched to Go Fish.)

＊（「ひとりポーカー」は　やめて
「ひとり　だいひんみん」に
したようだ）

Inside Snowdin's local restaurant, a dog sits at a table all alone. At first, the dog plays poker against itself, but it switches to other card games as *Undertale*'s story unfolds. Eventually, in the English script, the dog starts to play *Go Fish* against itself.

Go Fish is a card game usually played by two to five players, so the idea of playing it alone is slightly comical. And because *Go Fish* is so simple to play, it's particularly popular as a children's card game.

Although card games are popular in Japan, *Go Fish* isn't as widely known there as it is elsewhere in the world. For that reason, the *Undertale* translator replaced the *Go Fish* reference with a different card game that some Japanese children do play: *Daihinmin*.

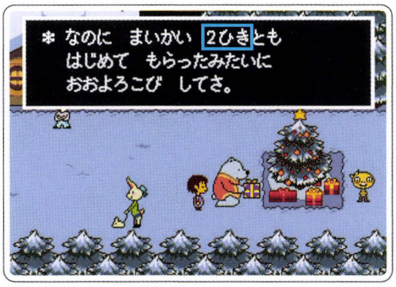
LEFT: *Go Fish* usually uses a standard card deck, but fish-themed *Go Fish* decks are common

RIGHT: *Daihinmin* and *Daifugō* also usually use a standard card deck, but custom sets exist too – some cities even have their own local rules!

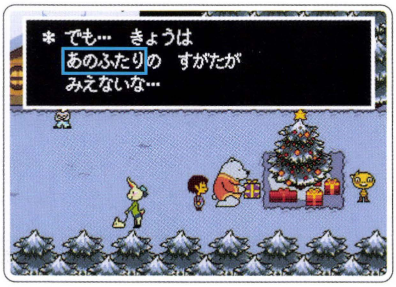
Go Fish
CARD GAME
AGES
3+
大富豪
大富豪専用トランプ
DAIFUGO PLAYING CARDS

Daihinmin ("Great Pauper"), more commonly known as *Daifugō* ("Great Millionaire"), is similar to the card games known as "Tycoon" and "President" in English. The goal of the game is to get rid of all your cards as quickly as possible. The winner of each round is declared the *daifugō* and the loser is called the *daihinmin*, so it's somewhat funny to imagine this goofy dog being both things at the same time.

Man's Best Friend



＊ なのに　まいかい　2ひきとも
はじめて　もらったみたいに
おおよろこび　してさ。



＊ でも…　きょうは
あのふたりの　すがたが
みえないな…

Japanese counter words like these are a good example of how even the most basic thing in one language can be much more complicated in another

Defeating Dogamy and Dogaressa in battle will cause a bear in Snowdin to wonder where they went. In English, the bear says:

> *Those two married dogs always put presents under the tree for each other. It's always the same. A single bone. But every time, they act like it's the first time they've gotten it. Then Papyrus comes to take his bones back.* ***Anyway, where are those two...?***

This would be relatively straightforward to translate into Japanese, except for one problem: counter words.

In English, we usually count objects by giving a number followed the name of the object: two dogs, 420 cats, seven farts. Sometimes, though, we use special "counter words" to count objects or groups of objects: three "heads" of lettuce, a "murder" of crows, a "tank" of gas.

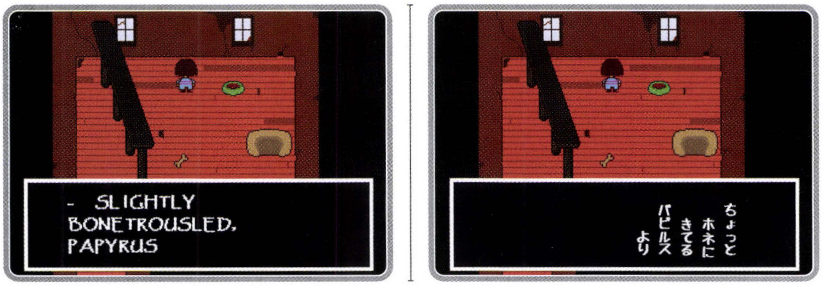
In Japanese, when counting objects, *everything* requires a counter word. For example:

- People are counted with 人 *(nin)*
- Small animals are counted with 匹 *(hiki)*
- Large animals are counted with 頭 *(tō)*
- Butterflies are also counted with 頭 *(tō)* for some reason
- Cylindrical objects are counted with 本 *(hon)*
- Flat things are counted with 枚 *(mai)*

In the English *Undertale* script, the bear says "those two married dogs" and "those two" when referring to Dogamy and Dogaressa, but how should they be counted in Japanese? The dogs walk and talk like people, which would warrant the counter word *nin*. But you can also pet them and play fetch with them like ordinary dogs, which would warrant *hiki*. So which should it be? And, perhaps more importantly, how would the Underground's denizens count them?

In the earliest drafts of the Japanese script, the translator chose *hiki* when referring to Dogamy and Dogaressa. Another team member later argued for using *nin* instead, given that they act overall more like people than dogs. The translator agreed and changed every instance of *hiki* to *nin*... but accidentally missed one. As a result, the bear refers to the dogs as people *and* as small animals in the final draft of the Japanese script.

Take My Word For It


- SLIGHTLY
BONETROUSLED,
PAPYRUS

ちょっと
ホネに
きてる
パピルス
より

Having direct input from Toby helped limit misinterpretations of his invented English words

Language dictionaries are an essential tool for any translator, but what happens when an author invents completely new words never seen before? This was a consistent issue during *Undertale*'s localization. Some problematic words included:

- Jippity jumpity joodle
- Low jinks
- Dapsolutely
- Passioneer
- Poff
- Sparkular
- Water sausage
- Fabuful
- Persistenester
- Aclog
- Freakadacious
- Japers
- Hotbaby
- Gentlebeauties

Toby knew these invented words wouldn't translate well, so he always included helpful notes whenever they appeared in the script. He also answered the localization team's follow-up questions regarding these unique words.

Even with Toby's input, however, each invented word became its own translation challenge. The localization team's general solution was to translate each invented word's intended meaning while adjusting the encompassing line to match the word's "feeling".

In one scene, for example, Papyrus leaves a letter for the main character. The letter ends with the message:

- SLIGHTLY BONETROUSLED,
PAPYRUS

In his translation notes, Toby explained "bonetrousled" with:

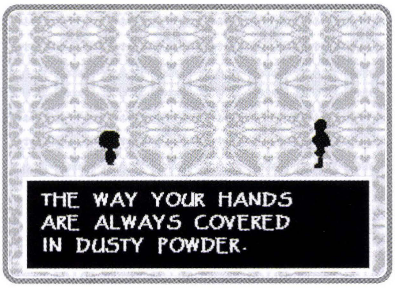
> *Bonetrousle is the name of Papyrus's boss theme. It's also a completely made up word that has absolutely no meaning but probably something akin to "bothered" or "troubled"?*

With this helpful information, the translator rephrased the Japanese line to say:

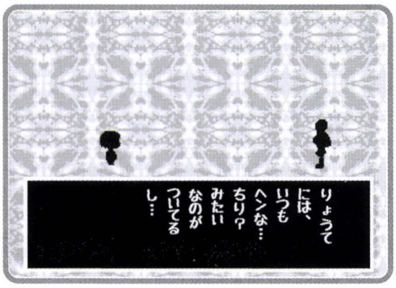
A bit bugged to the bone
From Papyrus

Other made-up words were handled in a similar way, with varying results.

Dust in the Wind



THE WAY YOUR HANDS
ARE ALWAYS COVERED
IN DUSTY POWDER.



りょうて
には、
いつも
ヘンな…
ちり？
みたい
なのが
ついてる
し…

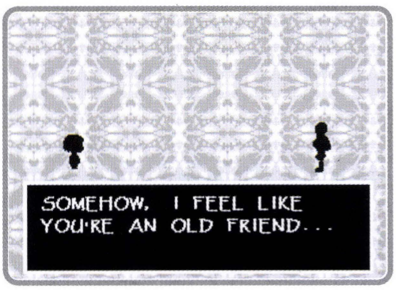
Never in my life did I imagine I'd be writing a book that explains how to translate dust

It's explained throughout *Undertale*'s story that when monsters die, they turn into dust. This simple fact became a little more complicated during the localization process, because there are multiple words in Japanese that mean "dust", each with its slightly different nuances. The localization team narrowed the choices down to three:

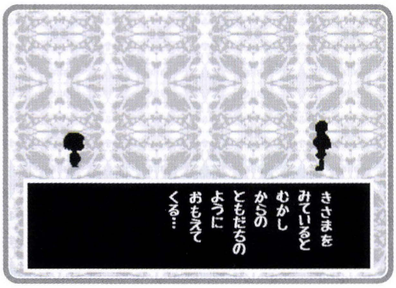
- *chiri* (dust that floats in the air and thinly covers things)
- *hokori* (small, possibly fluffy clumps of dust)
- *kona* ("powder")

After a lot of internal discussion, and after consulting with Toby, the team settled on using the term *chiri* to describe what monsters turn into after death.

Bug Busting



SOMEHOW, I FEEL LIKE
YOU'RE AN OLD FRIEND...



きさまを
みていると
むかし
からの
ともだちの
ように
おもえて
くる…

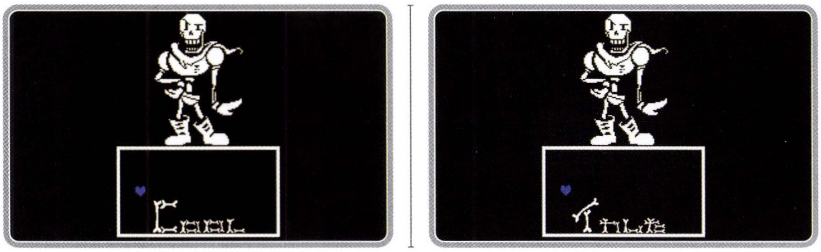
Sometimes, localization can strengthen the author's original work. This bug in the English version of *Undertale* was found and fixed during its Japanese localization, for example

After the original English version of *Undertale* was released, intrepid fans dissected the game's data and found a treasure trove of unused text, graphics, and more. As the localization team discovered, though, some of this unused text only went unused due to programming mistakes in the original release.

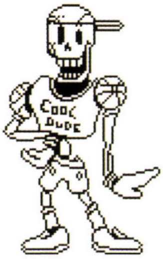
One such mistake occurs during the dramatic pre-battle encounter with Papyrus. If the player has spared Papyrus in a previous run through the game, Papyrus is designed to have alternate dialogue about their previous meeting. It turns out that this line had a bug in it, though, so it didn't trigger during normal gameplay.

Although the localization team members knew how to fix this bug, they waited until Toby gave his approval to implement it. Thus, Papyrus' alternate dialogue now appears as designed in all versions of the game, on all platforms, in both English and in Japanese.

Translation Collision



During this battle, the player must dodge bones that scroll by quickly and spell a funny phrase

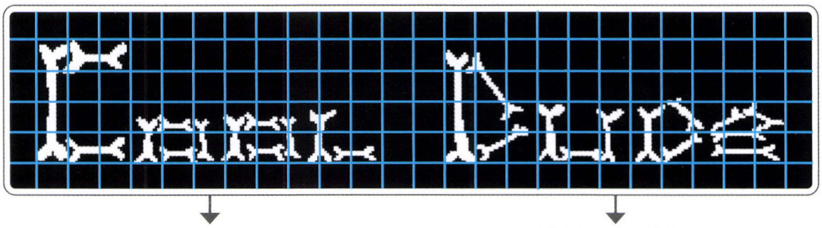


Papyrus has a "COOL DUDE" attack and wears a "COOL DUDE" outfit at one point, but localizing the attack text into Japanese broke this connection

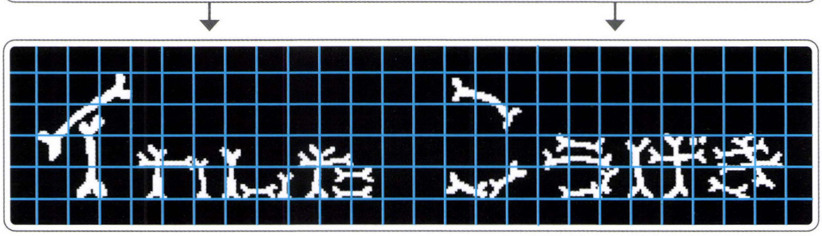
In battle, Papyrus repeatedly and humorously states that he has a special attack that he's prepared to use if need be. Eventually, he unleashes his special attack, which is flashy, strange, and funny all at once. In the English version of *Undertale*, this attack ends with the eight-character message "COOL DUDE" spelled out in bones. The player must then dodge this text as it quickly scrolls by.

Because this English bone text is somewhat difficult to read and scrolls by quickly, the translator felt it would benefit the gameplay experience to localize the bone text into Japanese. But as Toby noted, any changes to "COOL DUDE" would likely change the difficulty of avoiding the scrolling text. With this in mind, the translator looked for a phrase that could say roughly the same thing in Japanese using the exact same number of characters as the English message.

After some brainstorming for a replacement message, the translator chose the phrase イカした こうげき (*ikashita kōgeki*), which roughly means "cool attack" or "totally sweet attack". This phrase was then given to the game art studio 256graph to transform into graphical form. 256graph not only created all-new Japanese bone text, but also ensured that its height and width closely matched the height and width of the original English bone text.



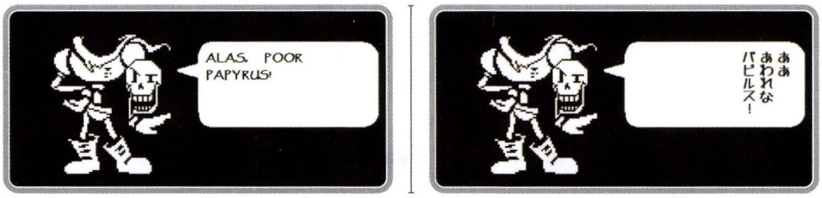
They definitely don't teach hit box localization in textbooks or school, this is uncharted territory for almost everyone



The localized Japanese bone text closely matches the dimensions of the original English bone text

All of this teamwork resulted in a Japanese phrase with the same number of characters as the English phrase, hitboxes that closely match the original game's hitboxes, and all-new bone graphics that look just like the original English bone graphics. Even more impressive is that all of this work was done for one short message that stays on the screen for less than five seconds!

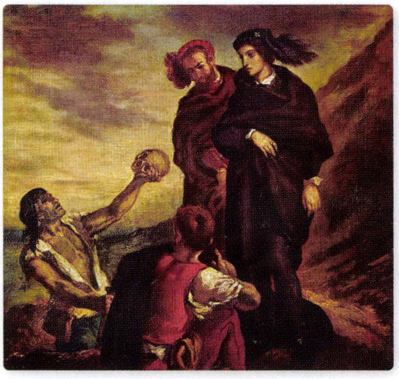
Just Ahead



An *Undertale*-themed retelling of Shakespeare plays would be interesting to see

If Papyrus is defeated in battle, his head falls in his hand and he says in English:

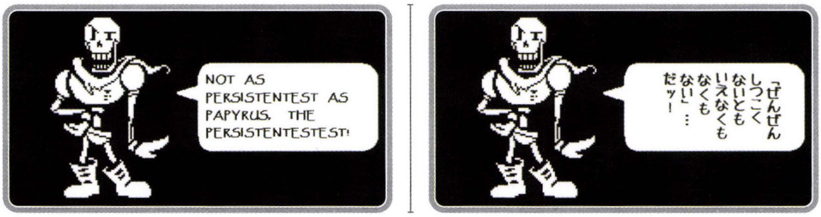
> *ALAS, POOR PAPYRUS!*



Hamlet holds Yorick's skull before *not* saying "I knew him well"

Toby noted that this is a reference to the famous Shakespeare quote, "Alas, poor Yorick!", which Hamlet says while holding a skull. The translator preserved this reference by quoting the same line from a Japanese translation of *Hamlet*. However, the translator also noted that the quote is less recognizable in Japanese and thus more likely to be missed by Japanese players.

Grammar Explosion


NOT AS PERSISTENTEST AS PAPYRUS. THE PERSISTENTESTEST!
「ぜんぜんしつこくないともいえなくもなくもない」…だッ！

Papyrus' non-stop weird vocabulary and grammar made him particularly tricky but fun to localize into Japanese

After losing to Papyrus three times, Papyrus will say in English:

> *I AM THE PERSISTENTEST! AND IF YOU THINK YOU ARE PERSISTENESTER... THAT IS WRONG! GRAMATICALLY WRONG! BECAUSE THE CORRECT FORM WOULD BE... "NOT AS PERSISTENTEST AS PAPYRUS, THE PERSISTENTESTEST!"*

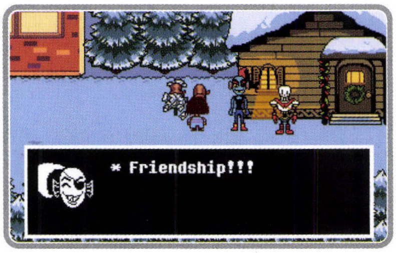
To retain this bizarre grammar abuse, the translator rephrased the text a bit:

> *I AM MORE INTENSELY PERSISTENT! IF YOU'RE THINKING "I'M WAY MORE PERSISTENT"... THEN THAT'S WRONG... GRAMMATICALLY WRONG! THE CORRECT FORM WOULD BE... "IT'S NOT UN-NON-REASONABLE TO SAY YOU'RE WAY MORE UN-PERSISTENT!"*

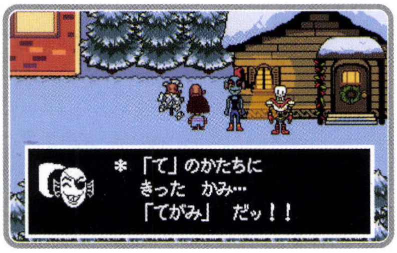
This new line emulates the English line's bizarre grammar by using a flurry of negatives in a row. This keeps the line comical, nonsensical, and very Papyrus-like.

Making the Grade

The Japanese word *tegami* ("a postal letter") combines the words *te* ("hand") with *kami* ("piece of paper")



* Friendship!!!



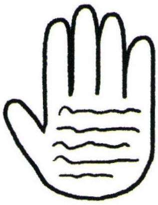
* 「て」のかたちに
きった かみ…
「てがみ」 だッ！！

Papyrus laments that Undyne, his boss and friend, doesn't write him letters:

> *Papyrus: WHY DIDN'T SHE WRITE A LETTER TO ME INSTEAD?*
> *Undyne: Fine, you want a letter!? I'll give you a letter!!! YOU GET AN "F"!*
> *Papyrus: OH NO!!! WHAT'S THE F FOR?*
> *Undyne: Friendship!!!*

The translator replicated this joke by splitting the compound word *tegami:*

> *Papyrus: WHY WON'T UNDYNE WRITE ME A LETTER!?*
> *Undyne: Oh, you want a letter, huh!? Then take THIS!*
> *Papyrus: WHA--!? WHAT IS THIS LETTER? IT'S SHAPED FUNNY...*
> *Undyne: It's a* tegami *("letter")... A* te *("hand")-shaped* kami *("piece of paper")!*

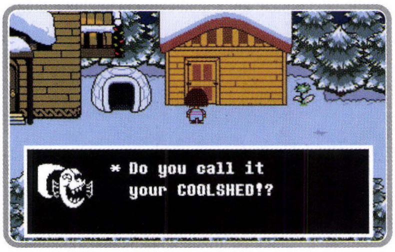


Japanese fans are asked to imagine a strangely shaped letter that looks like this

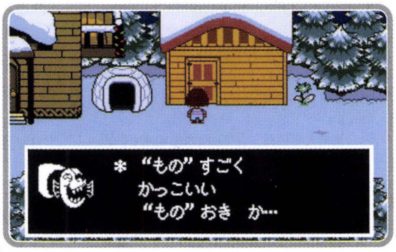
This new Japanese line remains letter-themed and includes Undyne teasing Papyrus. The gag about getting an "F" and "friendship" is lost, however.

Shed Head

This game has so many weird lines only accessible under weird circumstances, I'll never be able to cover everything in this book



* Do you call it
your COOLSHED!?



* "もの" すごく
かっこいい
"もの" おき か…

After Papyrus talks about his shed, Undyne makes a simple shed pun:

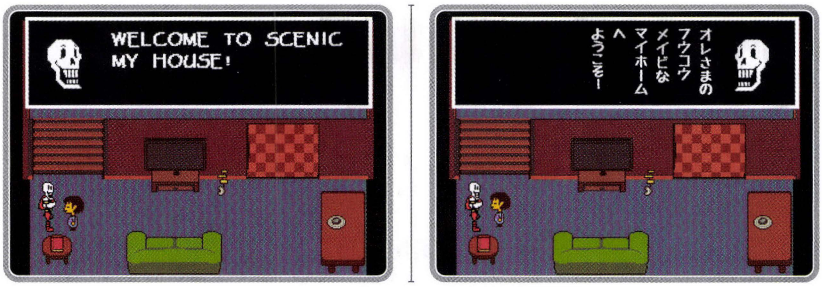
> *Papyrus: THAT'S JUST MY COOL TOOLSHED.*
> *Undyne: Do you call it your COOLSHED!?*

Because this English wordplay would be lost in a straightforward translation, the translator replaced it with a Japanese play on the words *mono-sugoku* ("extremely") and *mono-oki* ("shed"):

> *Papyrus: THAT'S MY EXTREMELY COOL SHED.*
> *Undyne: Your* "mono-sugoku" *cool* "mono-oki"*, huh...*

The resulting Japanese joke works differently than the English joke, but remains mildly amusing through the use of this new wordplay.

Home Sweet Home


WELCOME TO SCENIC
MY HOUSE!
オレさまの
フウコウ
メイビな
マイホーム
へ
ようこそー

The English grammar here almost feels broken at first, but it turns out it's just Papyrus being weird

Papyrus gives the main character a tour of his home. In English, he begins by saying:

> *WELCOME TO SCENIC MY HOUSE!*

This is a humorous reference to the stereotypical signs found at American tourist destinations, such as "Welcome to historic Licking, Missouri" and "Welcome to scenic Boogertown, North Carolina". Naturally, referring to the inside of one's home as a scenic tourist destination sounds ridiculous. The entire English sentence sounds off-kilter at first, too.

Japanese tourist spots don't follow the same phrasing pattern to welcome visitors, so the original cultural reference was lost in translation. The core joke of calling one's home "scenic" works in any language, though, so this line was given a simple, straightforward translation into Japanese.

Est. 1885
Welcome to Historic
PLAINS, GEORGIA
Home of
JIMMY CARTER
39th President of the United States
WELCOME
TO Fabulous
LAS VEGAS
NEVADA

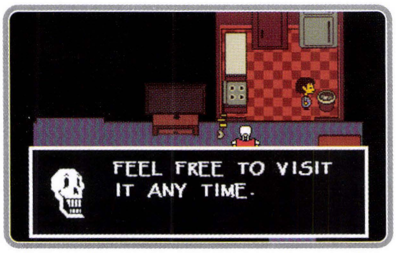
The "Welcome to (Adjective) Place-Name" pattern is a common sight at American tourist spots

WELCOME TO
SCENIC
LAUREL LAKE
Commercial Township
A Clean Community

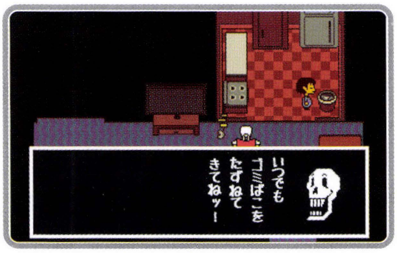
I wonder if anyone has ever made their own *Undertale*-themed "Welcome to Scenic My House" doormats or signs

Vacation Dedication

Is Papyrus being sarcastic or serious? It's for you to decide!



FEEL FREE TO VISIT IT ANY TIME.



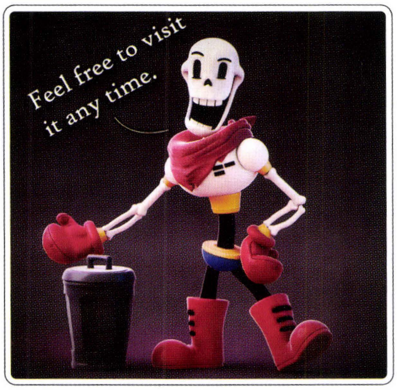
いつでも ゴミばこを たずねて きてねッ！

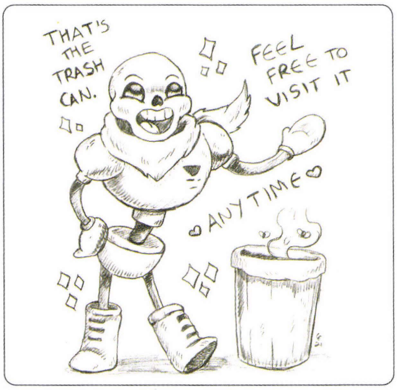
During his bizarre house tour, Papyrus points at his garbage can and says:

THAT'S THE TRASH CAN. FEEL FREE TO VISIT IT ANY TIME.

In his notes, Toby emphasized that "people love to copy and paste this line to tell ppl they have bad taste... hopefully we can maintain this quotability".

This Papyrus quote has led to a ton of English-language fan art, but not nearly as much Japanese fan art

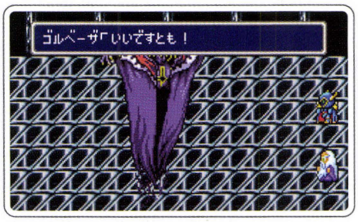




Although this line did receive extra attention during *Undertale*'s localization, it basically became a literal translation of the English text. Japanese fans do quote it from time to time, but it's not nearly as popular as the original English quote.

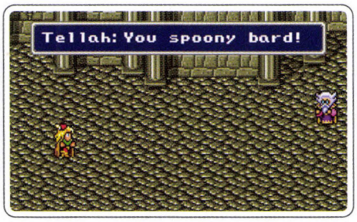
Translation Memorability

The "quotability" of a line is hard to control during translation, as it's the audience who ultimately decides what's memorable and what isn't. The classic Japanese RPG *Final Fantasy IV* provides a great example of this:



ゴルベーザ「いいですとも！

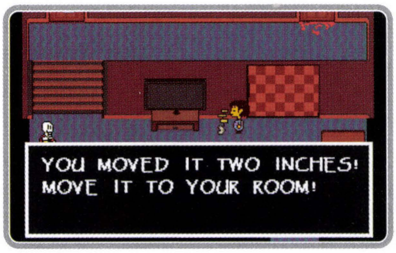
ii desu to mo! (roughly "Indubitably!") is a famous game quote in Japan, but the same line is forgettable in English

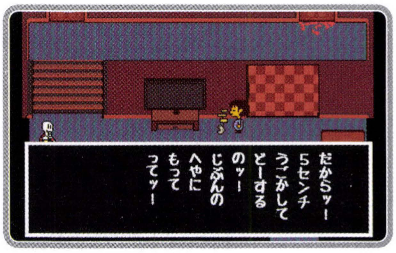


Tellah: You spoony bard!

"You spoony bard!" is a very famous English-language game quote, but the same line is forgettable in Japanese

Absolute Units


YOU MOVED IT TWO INCHES! MOVE IT TO YOUR ROOM!

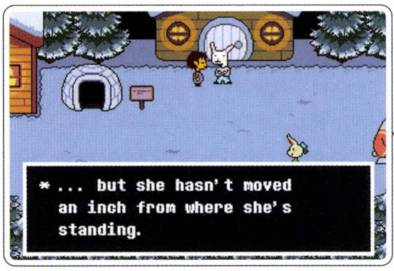

だからッー! 5センチ うごかして どーする のッー! じぶんの へやに もって ってッー!

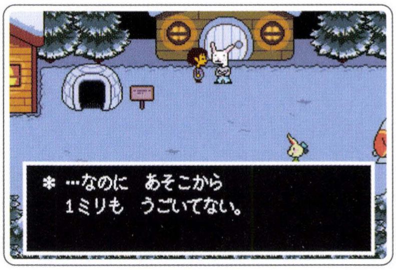
I mean, technically, it should be localized as "YOU MOVED IT 5.08 CENTIMETERS!" but please don't tell the math police

As part of his tour, Papyrus shows off Sans' sock collection. This collection includes a series of back-and-forth notes between the two brothers:

> *SANS! PLEASE PICK UP YOUR SOCK!*
> *ok.*
> *DON'T PUT IT BACK DOWN! MOVE IT!*
> *ok.*
> *YOU MOVED IT TWO INCHES! MOVE IT TO YOUR ROOM!*

Japan uses the metric system, so the translator converted the measurement of "two inches" to "five centimeters". This is an understandable translation change that hardly seems noteworthy on its own, but it's also a nice example of how math – and not just text – can play a part in the localization process too.


* ... but she hasn't moved an inch from where she's standing.


＊ …なのに あそこから 1ミリも うごいてない。

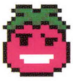
Reader Challenge #5: Calculate how many millimeters there are in an inch, but without using technology!

Similar measurement changes can be found throughout *Undertale*'s Japanese script. In some cases, when the measurements aren't meant to be taken literally to begin with, the translator chose a suitable replacement. For example, a character in Snowdin shares this remark:

> *That lady over there's been going for a walk for a while now. ... but she hasn't moved an inch from where she's standing.*

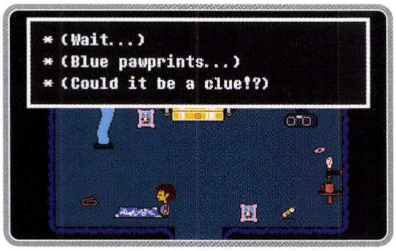
This reference to "an inch" wasn't meant to be taken literally, so the translator replaced it with "one millimeter". This is a terribly inaccurate conversion, of course, but by straying from the literal meaning of the source text, the translator was able to retain the intended, functional meaning instead.

Matters that involve length, area, volume, temperature, and money come up all the time during translation, so as a translator/localizer it's helpful to have a basic understanding of mathematics and units of measurement.

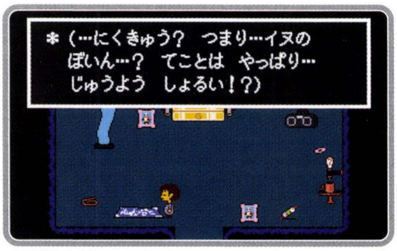


Blue Collar Crime

There's some argument that "pawprint" should be a legitimate spelling given that "fingerprint" is okay. It looks like Toby is part of Team Pawprint and not Team Paw Print



* (Wait...)
* (Blue pawprints...)
* (Could it be a clue!?)



＊（…にくきゅう？ つまり…イヌの
ぼいん…？ てことは やっぱり…
じゅうよう しょるい！？）

The PlayStation 4 and PlayStation Vita versions of *Undertale* include a secret dog shrine. Donating money at the shrine will unlock various unusual decorations. One such decoration is a piece of white paper covered in blue pawprints.

In English, checking this piece of paper produces the message:

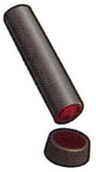
> *(Huh!? Blueprints...!?)*
> *(Literally. It's white paper, but covered in little blue pawprints...)*
> *(Wait... Blue pawprints... Could it be a clue!?)*

The long-running *Blue's Clues* series has an insanely popular TV show, books, computer games, and more

This line is a simple pun on the English word "blueprints", but it also contains a reference to *Blue's Clues*, an American educational television series intended for children. Each episode features a puzzle, and a dog named Blue marks clues with a blue pawprint. The viewer is then asked to locate these clues and use them to solve the puzzle.

Both the "blueprints" joke and the *Blue's Clues* reference would be lost in a literal translation, so the translator adjusted things in the Japanese script:

> *(An important document...!?)*
> *(No, it's just ordinary piece of paper. It's covered with tiny paw prints.)*
> *(...Paw prints? Then, could they be... dog thumbprints? Which would mean... it's an important document after all!?)*
> *(...No. It really is just an ordinary piece of paper.)*

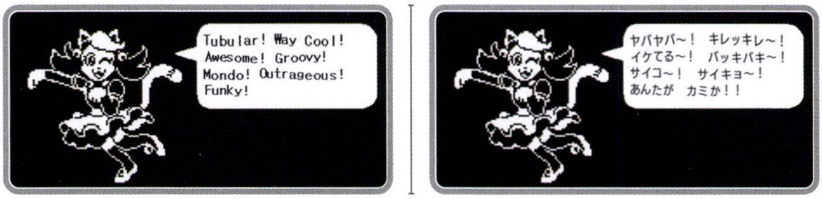


Personalized ink seals are commonly used to sign documents in Japan, although that trend seems to be changing lately

The translator explained the idea behind this localization change in the translation spreadsheet. Basically, in Japan, it's more common to stamp an important document with a *hanko* (a personalized ink seal) than with a signature. But if a *hanko* isn't available when filling out an important document, a thumbprint is usually an acceptable alternative.

As we can see, the translator prioritized the core purpose of this text over the need to include a cultural reference. As a result, this scene probably won't hold as much meaning for Japanese players as it holds for English-speaking players, but the scene will still make sense in Japanese.

Totally Rad

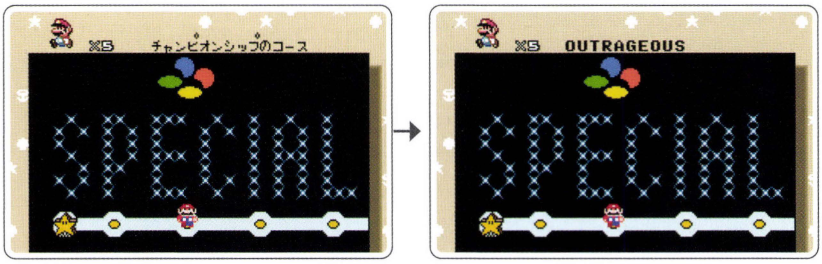

Tubular! Way Cool! Awesome! Groovy! Mondo! Outrageous! Funky!
ヤバヤバ～！ キレッキレ～！ イケてる～！ バッキバキ～！ サイコ～！ サイキョ～！ あんたが カミか！！

Toby continues to show his fondness for retro games with this English text, but that's lost in the Japanese text

Undertale's Nintendo Switch release includes an exclusive boss battle against Mad Mew Mew. During the battle, Mad Mew Mew says:

> *That was Gnarly! Tubular! Way Cool! Awesome! Groovy! Mondo! Outrageous! Funky!*

Toby didn't note it at the time, but these phrases are references to the English version of *Super Mario World*, a classic Super Nintendo game released in 1991. Specifically, these are the names of eight secret stages that require great expertise to complete. Unfortunately, the original Japanese version of *Super Mario World* used much simpler – and milder – names for these same stages:



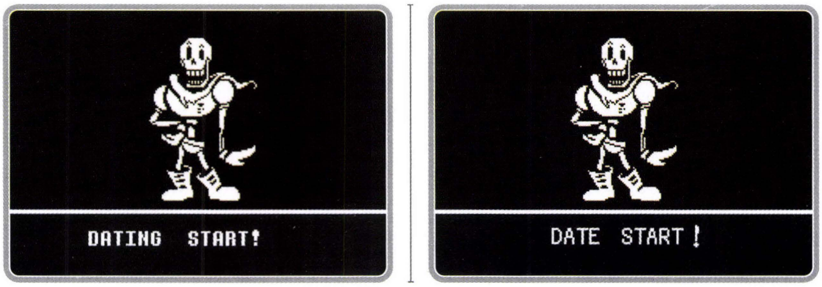
The secret stages in *Super Mario World* have very different names in Japanese and English – this sort of "make it sound less bland" approach is one of many different entertainment localization philosophies

Japanese Stage Name (roughly translated)	English Stage Name
Fun Course	Gnarly
Fun Course	Tubular
Even the Mario Staff will be Surprised Course	Way Cool
Even the Mario Staff will be Surprised Course	Awesome
Specialists' Course	Groovy
Specialists' Course	Mondo
Championship Course	Outrageous
Championship Course	Funky

Because these *Super Mario World* references would be lost in a literal translation, the translator replaced the English stage names with similar Japanese slang that *sounds* "hip" but is actually cheesy. Thus, the resulting translation prioritizes the scene's flow over the need to include any references.

Dating Game

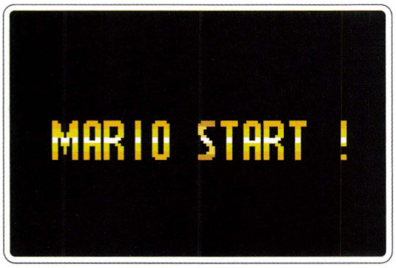
I don't need to date a skeleton, I already have one of my own


DATING START!

DATE START!

Eventually, the main character goes on a date with Papyrus, although it's actually more like a silly, date-themed battle.

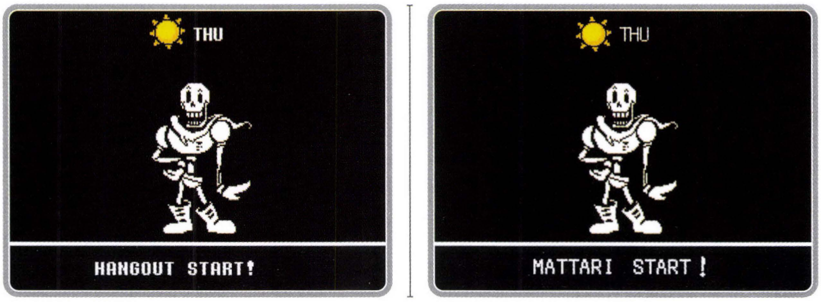
The Japanese version of *Super Mario World* always displays this message in English text


MARIO START !

When this Papyrus dating sequence begins, the English version of *Undertale* displays the text "DATING START!". Toby noted that this is another reference to *Super Mario World*, in which each stage begins with the messages "MARIO START!" or "LUIGI START!".

With this information in hand, the translator checked the Japanese version of *Super Mario World* and found that it also displays "MARIO START!" and "LUIGI START!" in English. For this reason, the translator chose to leave this dating message in English. The phrase was changed to "DATE START!", however, as the English word "date" already exists in the Japanese language and would be more recognizable to Japanese players.

We can see that "THU" remained unchanged during the localization process – this is because the English abbreviations for the days of the week are semi-common knowledge in Japan



HANGOUT START!

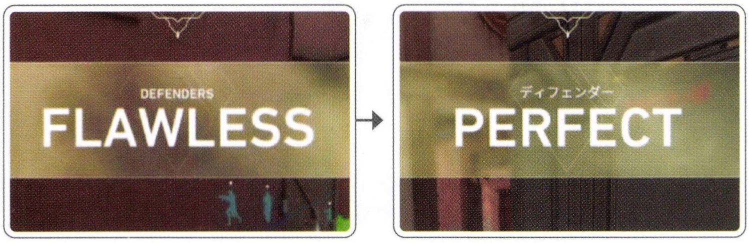
MATTARI START !

This *Super Mario World* reference also appears in an alternate scene, when the main character and Papyrus hang out in Papyrus' room instead of going on a date.

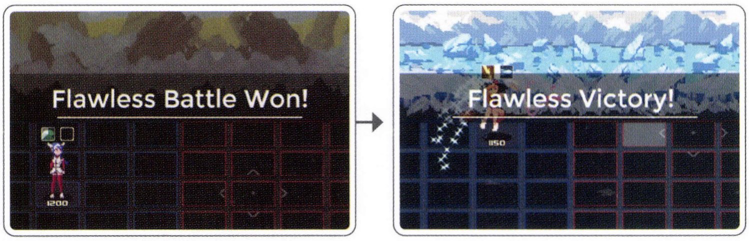
The English version of this sequence begins with the message "HANGOUT START!". The words "hang out" and "hangout" aren't well known in Japan, though, so "hangout" was replaced with the equivalent Japanese word *mattari*. Thus the Japanese game displays "MATTARI START!" in English before this scene begins.

Simplified English in Japanese Games

As we've seen, English words appear all the time in Japanese games. Over the years, these English words have formed a limited "English game vocabulary" that Japanese gamers naturally absorb. However, it's still common for English phrases to be simplified during English-to-Japanese game localization.

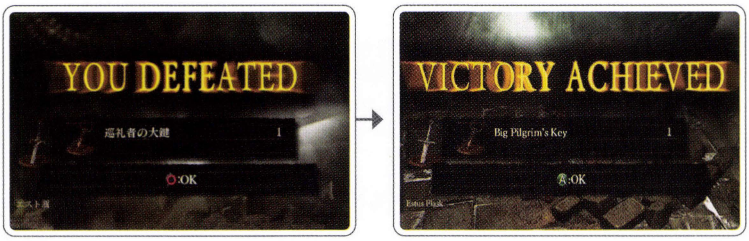

DEFENDERS
FLAWLESS
ディフェンダー
PERFECT

The English word "flawless" was replaced with the more recognizable English word "perfect" in the Japanese version of *Valorant* (2020)


Flawless Battle Won!
1200
Flawless Victory!
1150

Conversely, "flawless" was kept intact in the Japanese version of *One Step From Eden* (2020), but the phrase "battle won" was simplified to "victory"

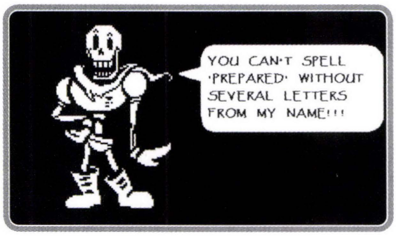
The reverse of this practice can happen too. Sometimes overly simplified English text in a Japanese game will be rewritten with more complicated English during the Japanese-to-English localization process.

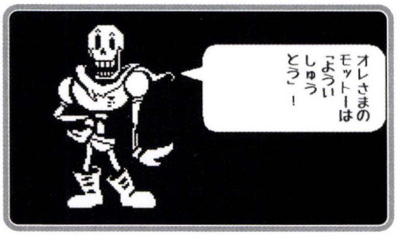

YOU DEFEATED
巡礼者の大鍵
1
:OK
VICTORY ACHIEVED
Big Pilgrim's Key
1
:OK
Estus Flask

This victory message in the original Japanese version of *Dark Souls* (2011) uses very simple English intended for Japanese players, while the English localization uses a larger vocabulary to rephrase the message in a more natural way

Spelling Master

For no reason at all, here are some anagrams of "Papyrus": Pa Syrup, Spray Up, Ray Pups, and Rap Yups




オレさまのモットーは「ようい しゅうとう」！

Papyrus starts the date by showing off his "official dating rulebook", then says:

> *YOU CAN'T SPELL 'PREPARED' WITHOUT SEVERAL LETTERS FROM MY NAME!!!*

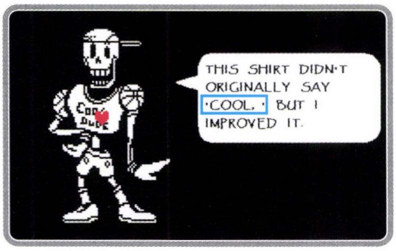
Because this line involves the spelling of an English word and the spelling of Papyrus' English name, the joke would be lost in a literal translation. After struggling with this line for some time, the translator decided to instead focus on the core meaning and purpose of the statement. Thus, Papyrus' line became:

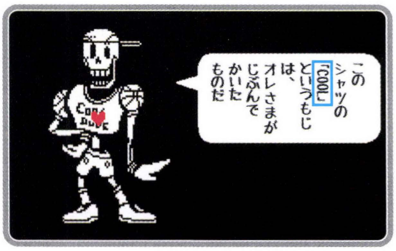
> *"Fully prepared" is my motto!*

Although the original joke was lost in translation, the translator did try to reintroduce some humor by using a slightly fancy phrase for "fully prepared", which fits Papyrus' tendency to use comically unexpected wording.

Flipping Out

I guess you have a big choice to make now: rotate your body or rotate the book


COOL DUDE
THIS SHIRT DIDN'T ORIGINALLY SAY 'COOL,' BUT I IMPROVED IT.


COOL DUDE
このシャツの「COOL」というもじは、オレさまがじぶんでかいたものだ

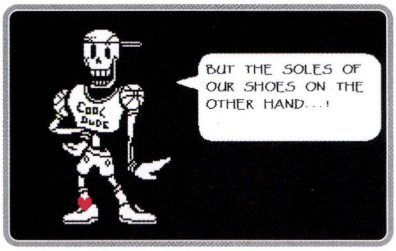
As we've already seen, Papyrus' Japanese text is written vertically from top to bottom, moving from right to left. This style of writing Japanese has been around for centuries. But what happens when foreign characters and symbols appear in vertical Japanese text?

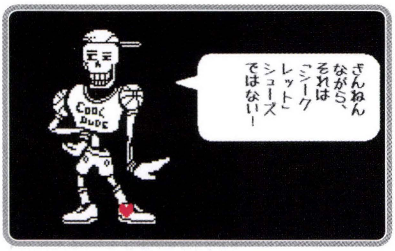
There are different methods of handling vertical foreign text – one common practice is to rotate the foreign characters before displaying them vertically, even though the surrounding Japanese characters aren't rotated. This is why the English word "COOL" appears sideways during the date with Papyrus.

Incidentally, all of Papyrus' text was written horizontally in the spreadsheet

PAPYRUS	\E0THIS SHIRT DIDN'T&ORIGINALLY SAY&'COOL^1,' BUT I&IMPROVED IT./	\E0この&シャツの&「COOL」&というもじ&は^1、&オレさまが&じぶんで&かいた&ものだ/

Getting Sneaky





Toby mentioned in his translation notes that this part of the game is "super inspired by Phoenix Wright"

During the date and hangout sequences, Papyrus mentions that his outfit contains a special secret. The player is then asked to identify that secret. If the player checks Papyrus' shoes in the English game, Papyrus responds with:

> *HUMAN SOULS ARE STRONGER THAN MONSTER SOULS...*
> *BUT THE SOLES OF OUR SHOES ON THE OTHER HAND...!*
> *ARE ABOUT THE SAME.*

This line includes a pun on the English words "soul" and "sole". The Japanese equivalents of these words don't share the same pronunciation, though, so the joke would be lost in a straightforward translation.

To get around this untranslatable English pun, the translator replaced the English shoe joke with a Japanese shoe joke:

> *The secret is in my shoes, you say...?*
> *Heh heh...*
> *Sorry to break it to you, but "secret shoes" these are not!*

At first glance, this Japanese response seems to be devoid of any jokes at all. However, the English phrase "secret shoes" is used in Japanese to refer to what are known elsewhere as "elevator shoes" – shoes designed to make the wearer look taller, in other words.

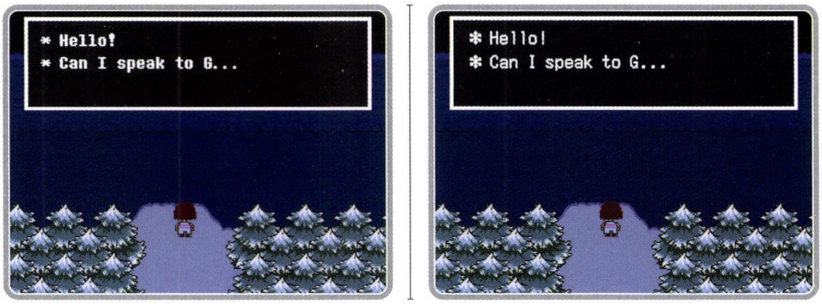
SECRET SHOES
シークレットシューズ
6cm UP

迷ったら…
SECRET SHOES
初めてのシークレットシューズ選び

I apologize for occupying some of your brain cells for the next several years with this random Japanese shoe fact

I really like this Japanese shoe joke – it fits the context, it's shoe-themed, it uses the word "secret", and it doesn't feel forced. It all comes down to personal opinion, but I feel this is a good example of a localization surpassing the original. It does lose the discussion about souls, though.

Mystery Call



* Hello!
* Can I speak to G...

* Hello!
* Can I speak to G...

Some English-speaking fans went straight to this line in the Japanese script to see if it revealed any more details about "G", but Toby had already anticipated them

Under very rare conditions, the player might receive a strange phone call from an unknown caller:

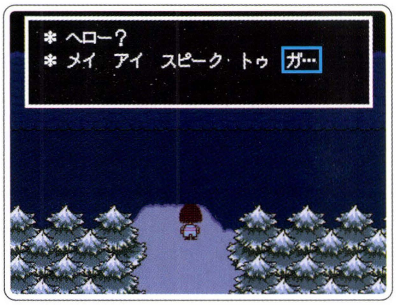
> *Hello! Can I speak to G...*
> *Wait a second. Is this the wrong number?*

It appears that the speaker starts to say someone's name, then stops before saying too much. There are several characters in *Undertale* with names that start with "G", including Grillby, Gerson, Gyftrot, and Glyde. But the prevailing theory among English-speaking fans is that "G" is actually referring to an incredibly mysterious and eerie character named Gaster.

Toby has been notoriously quiet when fans ask about certain details in *Undertale*. As a creator, he wants certain mysteries to remain mysteries, so he only left one short note about this line in the translation spreadsheet:

> “ *Character's name beginning with "G"... Actually, it might be suitably bizarre if you leave this line completely intact in English*

As we've already seen, the translation process can reveal details not found in the original work. In this case, because the Japanese language is based on syllables and not sounds, a standard translation of "can I speak to G?" into Japanese would result in a vowel appearing after "G". This would reveal more information about G's identity – enough for fans to solve this mystery. Toby understood this, and eventually firmly requested that this text remain completely in English. And, as he suggested, leaving it in English would make the line feel even stranger for Japanese players.

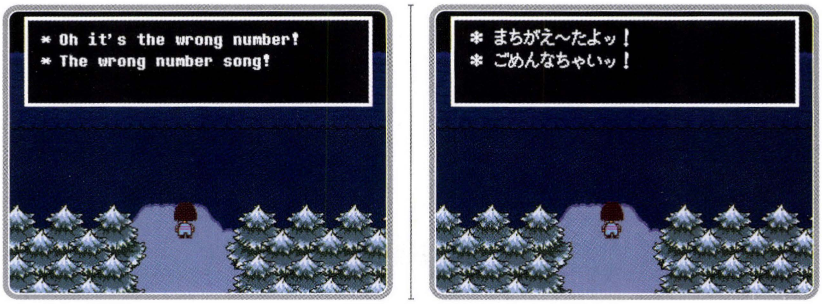


* ヘロー？
* メイ アイ スピーク・トゥ ガ…

Toby didn't explain "G" in his translation notes, so the localizers originally assumed it was meant to refer to Gaster, thus "G" became ガ (*Ga*) for a short time

Before Toby insisted that this phone call remain entirely in English, the localization team assumed – like many other fans – that "G" referred to this secretive Gaster character. As such, early drafts of the Japanese translation had this line say "Hello? May I speak to Ga--" in English, but written using Japanese pronunciation.

Wrong Number Song



* Oh it's the wrong number!
* The wrong number song!

* まちがえ～たよッ！
* ごめんなちゃいッ！

PROTIP: It's bad manners to sing a song if you dial the wrong number

After asking to speak to "G", the mystery caller apologizes for dialing the wrong number. The apology is in the form of a song accompanied by a short musical melody. The inclusion of this music allows English-speaking players to sing along during this scene.

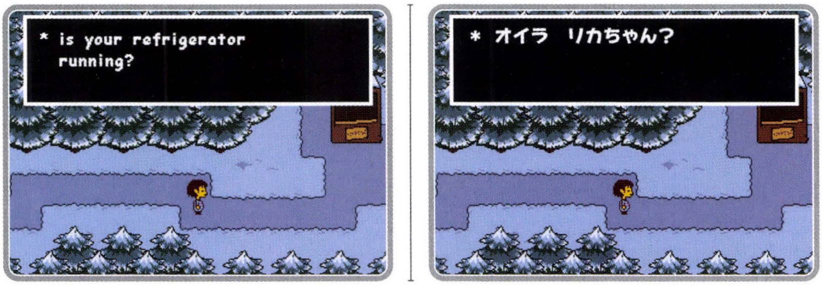
To ensure that Japanese players could enjoy and sing along to the same tune, the translator rewrote the song lyrics to use Japanese words that match the original music:

Original English lyrics	Japanese lyrics	Japanese meaning
Oh it's the wrong number! The wrong number song!	*machigae~ta yo!* *gomen nachai!*	I/we got it wrong! So sowwy!
We're very very sorry that we got it wrong	*kake machigaeta yo* *kimazui yo!*	I/we dialed the wrong number How awkward of me/us!
Oh it's the wrong number! The wrong number song!	*machigae~ta yo!* *gomen nachai!*	I/we got it wrong! So sowwy!
We're very very sorry that we got it wrong!	*kake machigaeta yo* *sayona-ra!*	I/we dialed the wrong number Goodbye~!

As we can see, these Japanese lyrics are completely new, yet still approximate the English lyrics in meaning and tone. The result is a funny, memorable song that Japanese players can also sing along to.

This song localization feels a lot like the Japanese "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" localization we saw near the start of this book!

Pranking Bad



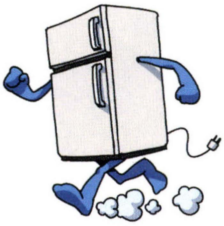
* is your refrigerator running?

* オイラ リカちゃん?

The Licca-*chan* reference in this Japanese line was meant to emulate the English line, but it did cause confusion for players unfamiliar with Licca-*chan*

A rare phone call from Sans can also occur during this section of the game. In English, Sans says:

English phone call	**Japanese phone call**
hey. is your refrigerator running?	hello? this is licca-*chan*?
(if you say yes) nice. i'll be over to deposit the brewskis. thanks for letting me know. good communication is important.	*(if you say yes)* oh, okay. you can call me by that name from now on then. it's important to double-check from time to time. there's no telling when your name might change on you, after all.
(if you say no) ok. i'll send someone over to fix it. thanks for letting me know. good communication is important.	*(if you say no)* oh, okay. you can keep on calling me "sans" then. it's important to make sure from time to time. there's no telling when your name might change on you, after all.



If your refrigerator is literally running, cheer it on

"Is your refrigerator running?" is a classic telephone prank in some English-speaking regions. The prank follows this pattern:

> *Receiver: Hello?*
> *Caller: Hey, is your refrigerator running?*
> *Receiver: Yes.*
> *Caller: Then you better go catch it!*

In his translation notes, Toby explains that the joke in this scene is an anti-joke: it has no point, there's no punchline, and Sans just takes everything literally.

This prank call based on an English pun wouldn't work in Japanese, so the translator replaced it with a reference to Licca-*chan*, a classic Japanese toy doll famous for having a real-life telephone hotline. But instead of answering as Licca-*chan*, he asks if *he's* Licca-*chan*. And just like in the English scene, Sans isn't calling as a prank – he's asking a genuine question. Thus, through creative localization, Sans' English, pun-based anti-joke became a phone-themed anti-joke with a cultural reference that Japanese players could recognize.

Meet Licca-*chan*

Licca-*chan* is a classic dress-up doll series in Japan that debuted in the late 1960s. In simple terms, Licca-*chan* is the Japanese equivalent of the United States' popular Barbie doll series.

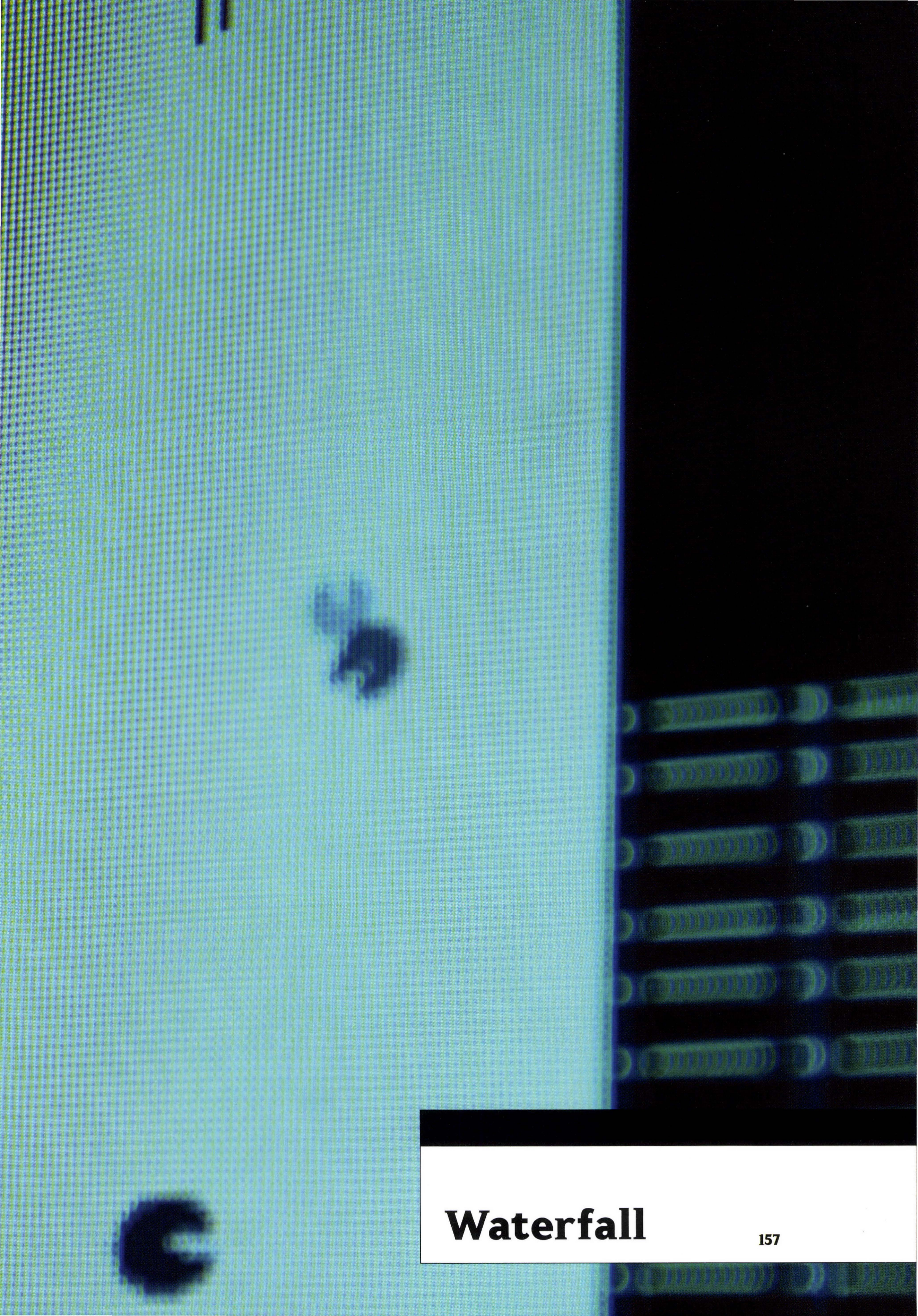
Licca-*chan*'s popularity among Japanese children spawned a "Talk to Licca-*chan*" phone service that began operating in 1968. Being old enough to call Licca-*chan* is almost like a generational rite of passage in some parents' eyes.

When someone calls the Licca-*chan* hotline – which is just a pre-recorded message that changes monthly – Licca-*chan* answers with:

> *Hello, this is Licca-*chan!

This opening sentence, which also serves as the hotline's catchphrase, has been featured in countless commercials and advertisements for decades.

リカちゃんの
ベルがなる
ボタンでんわ
ベルがなるリカちゃんでんわよ!!
（にんぎょうべつうり）
©タカラ
リカちゃんのかわり絵つき ゼンマイ・ベル付
実用新案 第120749号
発売元 トイメイト



Waterfall

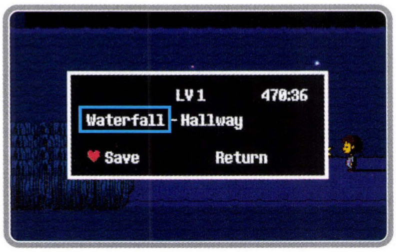
Waterfall

Human Traverses Treacherous Trickles

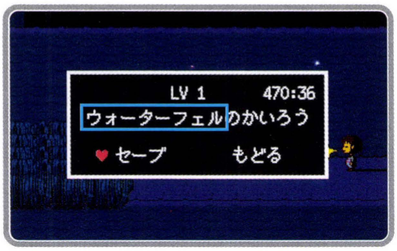
The main character heads for a distant castle to find the Underground's exit. The journey leads through a winding, watery path filled with dangers and delights.

Falling Water

Translation and localization are very subjective processes – it's like asking a group of people to draw a clown and then seeing a bunch of different styles of clowns



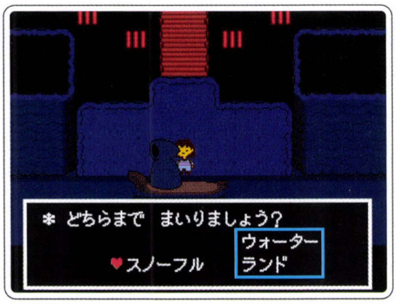
LV1 470:36
Waterfall - Hallway
♥ Save Return



LV 1 470:36
ウォーターフェルのかいろう
♥ セーブ もどる

After leaving Snowdin, the main character reaches a region named "Waterfall" in the English version of *Undertale*. Note that "Waterfall" is the actual name of the place – it isn't simply "a waterfall" in the general sense.

The temporary "Waterland" name in Japanese paralleled "Hotland", the name of another region in *Undertale*

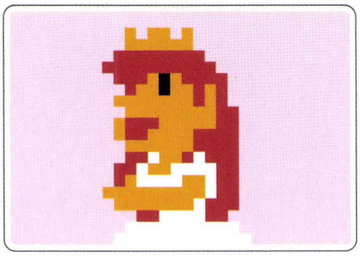


＊ どちらまで まいりましょう?
♥スノーフル ウォーターランド

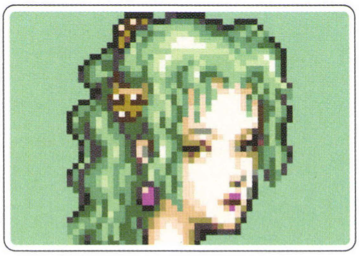
Because of this intentional ambiguity – and the fact that the English word "waterfall" isn't commonly known in Japanese – this location was named "Waterland" as a temporary placeholder. The localization team later settled on the name "Waterfell", which brought it closer to the original name, while "sounding" like the name of a place.

Subjective Name Changes in Localization

It's somewhat common for names to change during the localization process if their original names sound "off". Some past examples include:

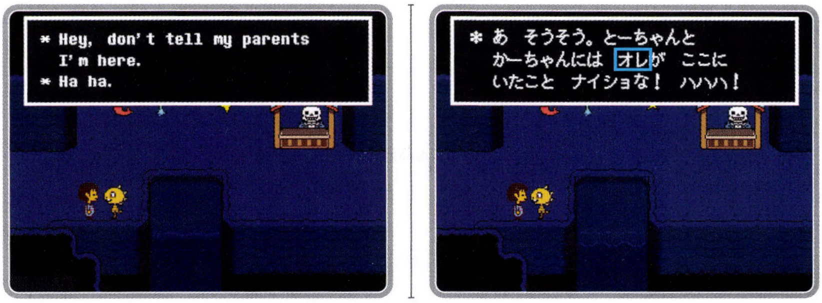


Princess Peach was renamed "Princess Toadstool" in *Super Mario Bros.'* English localization, presumably because "Peach" sounded "off" for a princess of the Mushroom Kingdom



Tina was renamed "Terra" in the English localization of *Final Fantasy VI*, supposedly because "Tina" doesn't sound "exotic" in English

Monster Kid Speaks

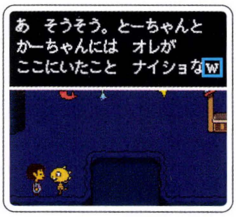

* Hey, don't tell my parents I'm here.
* Ha ha.

＊ あ　そうそう。とーちゃんと かーちゃんには オレが　ここに いたこと　ナイショな！　ハハハ！

Although Monster Kid uses the masculine pronoun オレ (*ore*) in Japanese, Toby designed the character to have no clear gender

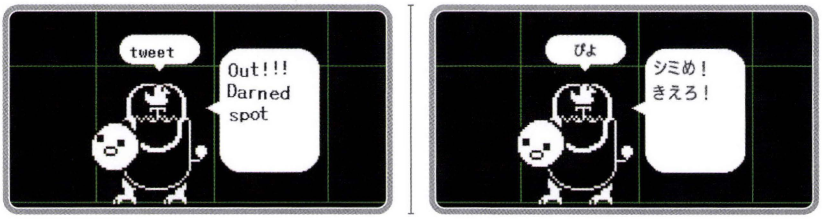
In the English script, a character called "Monster Kid" speaks like an energetic youth who loves to use slang. The translator preserved these attributes in Japanese, but this led to a problem: Monster Kid's gender is never specified in the original script, yet this Japanese speaking style makes the character sound like a teenage boy. After consulting with Toby, the translator gave Monster Kid the assertive, masculine pronoun *ore*.

In early drafts of the Japanese script, Monster Kid's laughter was denoted by the letter "w", which is the Japanese equivalent of "LOL" (laughing out loud) in English. Eventually, the localization team agreed that "w" felt too out of place, and gave the character a normal laugh instead.


あ　そうそう。とーちゃんと かーちゃんには　オレが ここにいたこと　ナイショなw

This use of Japanese Internet slang was meant to emphasize the Monster Kid's excitable youthfulness

Out Darned Spot

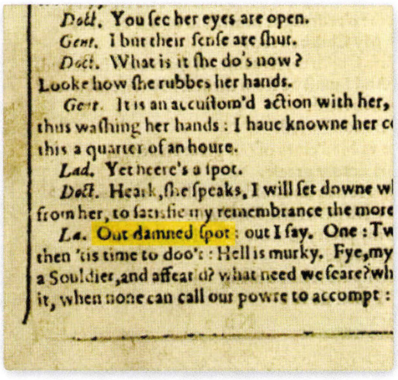


Wow, what do you know, my high school English literature classes *did* come in handy for my future job!

A local monster named Woshua lives to clean. Just before attacking the main character, Woshua sometimes says in English:

> *Out!!! Darned spot*

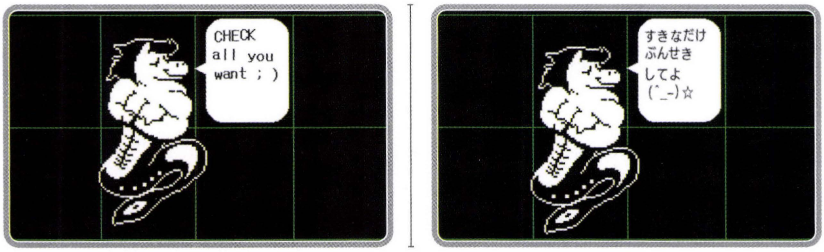
Toby noted that this is reference to the famous quote from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, "Out, damned spot! Out, I say!". Naturally, the translator consulted a Japanese translation of *Macbeth* and adapted the equivalent quote for Woshua's battle text. Although the reference is less recognizable in Japanese, the line fortunately still fits Woshua's dirt-despising personality.


Doct. You ſee her eyes are open.
Gent. I but their ſenſe are ſhut.
Doct. What is it ſhe do's now?
Looke how ſhe rubbes her hands.
Gent. It is an accuſtom'd action with her,
thus waſhing her hands: I haue knowne her c
this a quarter of an houre.
Lad. Yet heere's a ſpot.
Doct. Heark, ſhe ſpeaks, I will ſet downe w
from her, to ſatisfie my remembrance the more
La. Out damned ſpot: out I ſay. One: Tw
then 'tis time to doo't: Hell is murky. Fye, my
a Souldier, and affear'd? what need we feare? wh
it, when none can call our powre to accompt:

Lady Macbeth shouts this famous line while trying to wash imaginary blood from her hands

Aaron Speaks

Today, emoticons like (^_−)☆ feel outdated and associated with middle-aged guys desperately trying to flirt with girls online


CHECK all you want ;)

すきなだけ ぶんせき してよ (^_-)☆

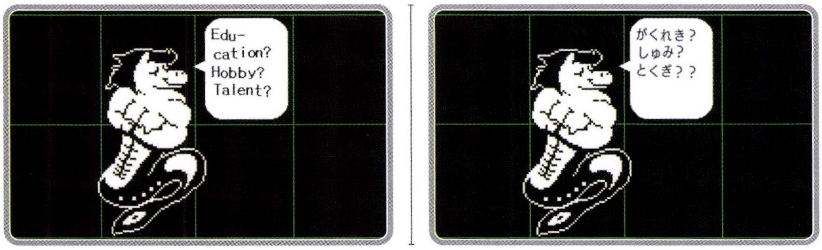
A seahorse monster named Aaron loves bodybuilding, muscles, and flirting with other characters. In his notes, Toby describes Aaron as “a buff horse whose flirty actions border on creepy”.

In Japanese, Aaron uses the friendly, boyish pronoun *boku* rather than the more “manly” pronoun *ore*. Although he doesn’t use pronouns very often, this uncharacteristic use of *boku* was intended to accentuate his “creepy” vibe.

In English, Aaron often ends his text with **;)** , which is a common Western emoticon of someone winking. Japanese emoticons are generally quite different, however, so the original winking face was replaced with a Japanese-style winking face: **(^_−)☆**

Pumping Fire

Entertainment translators need to be well-versed in many different fields of study to accurately recognize references without supplemental notes


Edu- cation? Hobby? Talent?

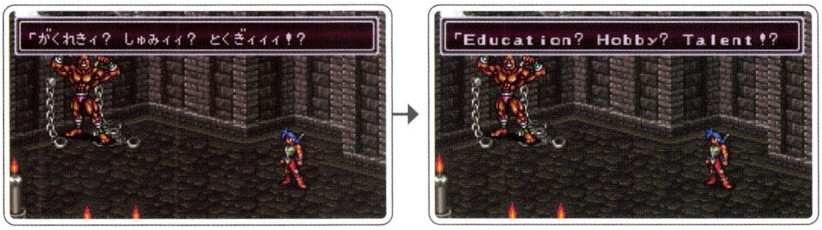
がくれき？ しゅみ？ とくぎ？？

During battle, Aaron sometimes says in English:

> *Education? Hobby? Talent?*

Toby noted that this this seemingly random line is actually a direct quote from a bodybuilding character in *Breath of Fire II*. The translator used Toby’s notes to find the equivalent Japanese line from *Breath of Fire II* in order to preserve the reference in the Japanese *Undertale* script. Fortunately, the *Breath of Fire II* line is the same in Japanese and English, so no extra adaptation work was needed.

In *Breath of Fire II*, this musclebound Director of HR repeats the same three questions during battle, as if giving a job interview

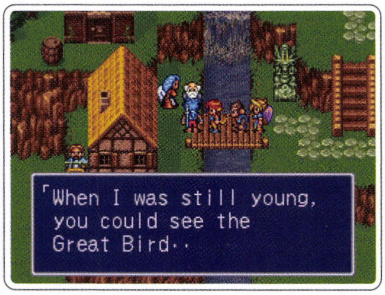

「がくれきィ？ しゅみィィ？ とくぎィィィ！？

「Education? Hobby? Talent!?

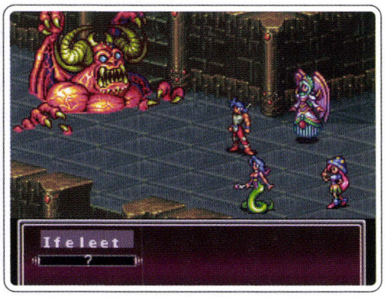
Inspiration Spotlight: *Breath of Fire II*

BREATH of FIRE II
Official Nintendo Seal of Quality
KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
AGES 6+
CAPCOM
SUPER NINTENDO
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

CAPCOM
BREATH of FIRE II
使命の子



「When I was still young,
you could see the
Great Bird··

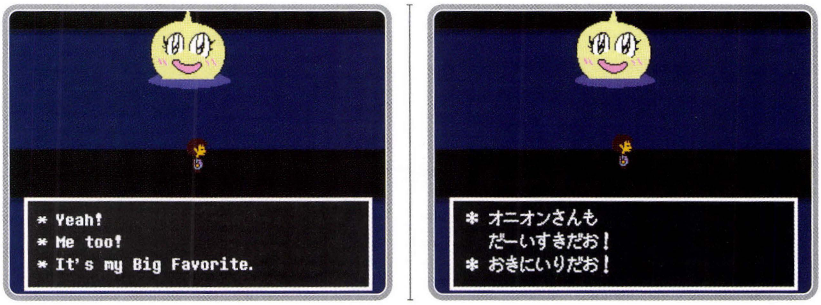


Ifeleet
?

In 1994, Capcom released a Super Famicom role-playing game known as *Breath of Fire II* in Japan. A North American version was released in 1995, and a European version was released in 1996. Although it boasts solid game design and a memorable story, *Breath of Fire II* has also earned notoriety for its poor English-language localization.

The game's story sets an orphan and a band of unique characters on a quest to destroy a corrupt religious cult, solve the mystery surrounding a giant sleeping dragon, and ultimately save the world from destruction.

Onionsan Speaks



* Yeah!
* Me too!
* It's my Big Favorite.

＊ オニオンさんも
　だーいすきだお！
＊ おきにいりだお！

In Japanese, Onionsan pronounces his sentences like a big, goofy-sounding character

A giant, onion-like creature named Onionsan appears in Waterfall. Toby described Onionsan's speaking style by saying "no one talks like this lol" and "no one says 'big favorite' lol". The overall effect is that Onionsan sounds lonely and insecure, but also goofy and upbeat.

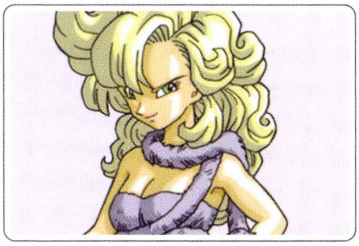
In Japanese, Onionsan ends sentences in a way that's associated with childishness, silliness, and awkward nerdiness. The Japanese script also treats the "san" part of "Onionsan" as the Japanese name suffix *-san*, which is roughly equivalent to "Mr." or "Ms." In English. However, it's improper to add *-san* when saying your own name, so this localization choice adds another layer of social awkwardness to the character.

As with several other characters in *Undertale*, Onionsan's gender is meant to be unclear. As such, Onionsan usually uses the polite, somewhat gender-neutral Japanese pronoun *watashi*. On other occasions, Onionsan simply says "Onionsan" instead of using a pronoun, which lends the character even more of a childish vibe.

Japanese Personal Pronouns: (own name)

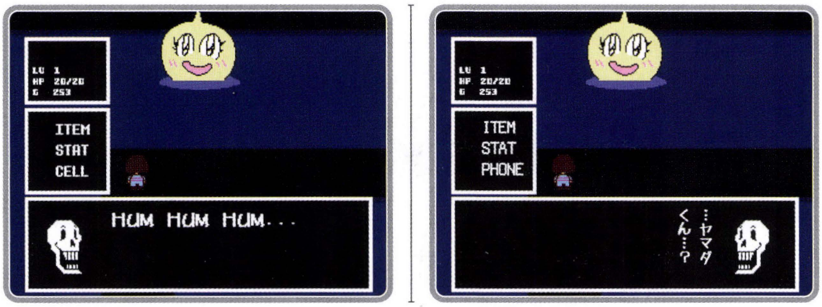
In Japanese entertainment, characters sometimes refer to themselves by using their own name rather than a pronoun. This happens in other languages too, of course, but it's extraordinarily common in Japanese media. The use of one's own name instead of a pronoun can make a character seem childish, endearing, or uncivilized. Examples of such pronoun-less characters include:

Relm
(*Final Fantasy VI*)



Ayla
(*Chrono Trigger*)

Playing Onion Games



HUM HUM HUM...

…ヤマダくん…？

Other characters say "hum hum hum" as a gameplay hint, but Toby's notes paint this particular "hum hum hum" as more of a fun reference than a hint

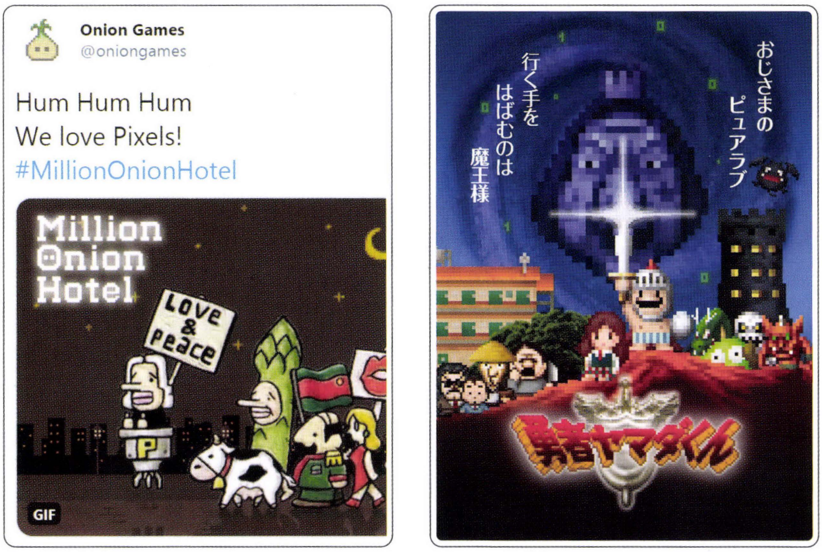
If the player calls Papyrus' cell phone twice while in Onionsan's room, Papyrus will say in English:

> *HUM HUM HUM...*

In his translation notes, Toby explained that this is an indirect gameplay hint and a reference to the game development studio Onion Games. More specifically, it's a reference to what Onion Games' avatar often says in English-language messages online. Toby wasn't sure if this reference would work in Japanese, however, so the translator revised Onionsan's line to say:

> *Yamada-kun...?*

This new line is a reference to one of Onion Games' most popular games, known in Japan as *Yūsha Yamada-kun* ("Yamada the Hero") and elsewhere as *Dandy Dungeon*. This localization change has two effects: it makes the reference recognizable in Japanese, and it strengthens the original line's connection between Onionsan and Onion Games.


Onion Games
@oniongames

Hum Hum Hum
We love Pixels!
#MillionOnionHotel

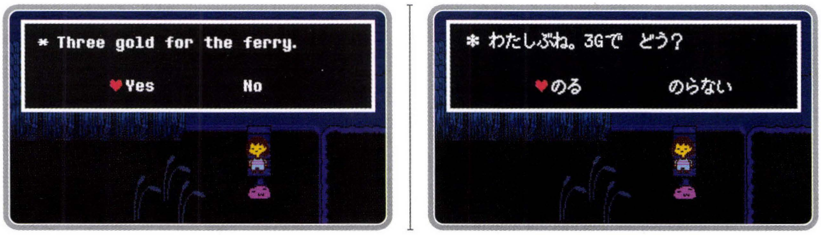
Million Onion Hotel
Love & Peace
GIF
おじさまのピュアラブ
行く手をはばむのは魔王様
勇者ヤマダくん

LEFT: The "hum hum hum" in an Onion Games tweet

RIGHT: *Yūsha Yamada-kun/Dandy Dungeon* is about a programmer who aims to create his own ideal game

Money Minded

Translation spreadsheets are usually enormous walls of text without context, which makes lines like this very easy to get wrong in translation


* Three gold for the ferry.
♥Yes No

＊ わたしぶね。3Gで どう？
♥のる のらない

A purple monster offers to give the main character a ferry ride. In English, it says:

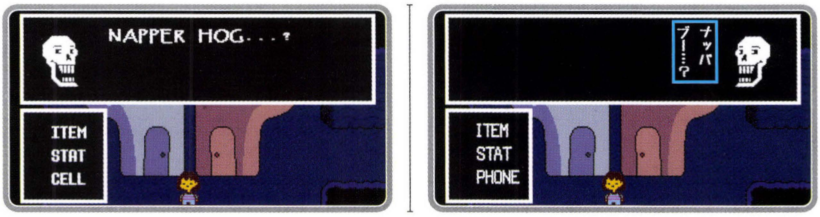
> *Three gold for the ferry.*

Toby worded this line to fool players into thinking that the purple monster charges three gold pieces per ferry ride. In actuality, the purple monster *gives* the player three gold pieces *after* the ferry ride. It's a small, unexpected gag that pokes fun at veteran gamers' expectations.

Because this line plays with vagueness and expectations, and because Toby didn't mention this line in his translation notes, a rushed translator or an automated translator would've almost certainly mistranslated it as "it costs three gold to ride the ferry". Fortunately, *Undertale*'s localization team did recognize the joke and was able to properly preserve it in the Japanese script.

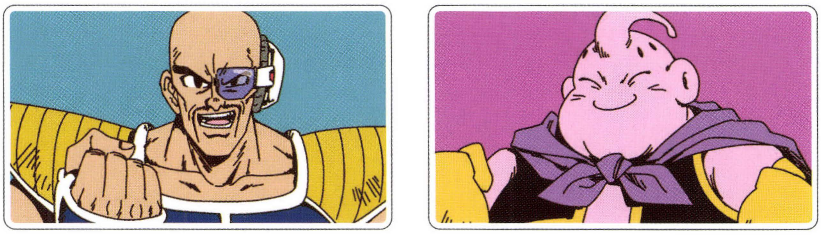
Music Ghost Z

Papyrus continually messes up Napstablook's name and accidentally hits upon the name ナッパブー (*nappa bū*)


NAPPER HOG...?

ナッパブー…？

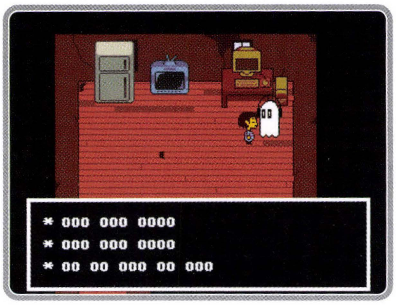
Papyrus struggles with Napstablook's name and calls the character "Napper Hog". He corrupts Napstablook's name in a similar way in Japanese, resulting in the name *Nappa Buu*. The translator noted that this wasn't intentional at first, but both "Nappa" and "Buu" are characters from the *Dragon Ball Z* series.


LEFT: Nappa is an early foe in *Dragon Ball Z*

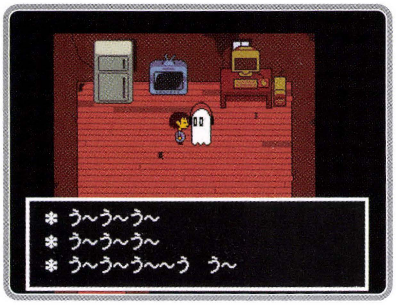
RIGHT: Buu is a major enemy much later in *Dragon Ball Z*

When Napstablook was still named "Winnybore" in early drafts of the Japanese script, Papyrus corrupted "Winnybore" into ウィンナーボー (*winnābō*), which can be humorously interpreted as "Weiner Stick", among other things.

Bootiful Music



* ooo ooo oooo
* ooo ooo oooo
* oo oo ooo oo ooo



＊ う〜う〜う〜
＊ う〜う〜う〜
＊ う〜う〜う〜〜う　う〜

If someone handed me a song like this and asked me to translate it, I'd assume it's a trick question at first

Napstablook enjoys some ghostly "spooktunes" with the main character. In the English script, the lyrics to one song are simply:

ooo ooo oooo
ooo ooo oooo
oo oo ooo oo ooo

Actual music – accompanied by spooky vocal sounds – plays while these lyrics are displayed. The song seems like random, meaningless nonsense at first, but Toby noted that the song is actually "Jingle Bells", the classic popular Christmas song.

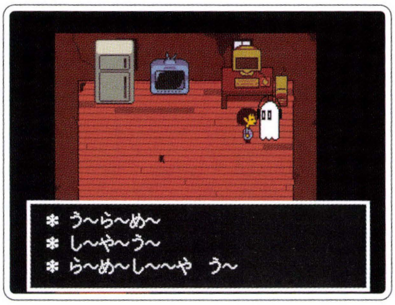
In English, ghosts sometimes say "oo" as a stereotypical spooky sound. Hoping to preserve this idea in Japanese, the translator gave the song new lyrics:

u∼ra∼me∼
shi∼ya∼u∼
ra∼me∼shi∼∼ya u∼

ローカライズの伝説レコード
LOL-003
STEREO
ジングル・ベル
JINGLE BELLS
サンタクロース
が町に来る
SANTA CLAUS IS COMIN' TO TOWN
OG・Sanタ

As we've already seen, classic Christmas songs are known in Japan, and many of them have received multiple translations into Japanese. I wonder if there are ever heated arguments about which version of "Jingle Bells" is the "truer" translation

In Japanese, *urameshiya* (roughly "oh, how I begrudge you" or "I curse you") is a stereotypical phrase that ghosts say, similar to how ghosts say "boo" or "oo" in some English-speaking regions. Even with these new Japanese lyrics, however, the song was crafted to follow the tune of "Jingle Bells".



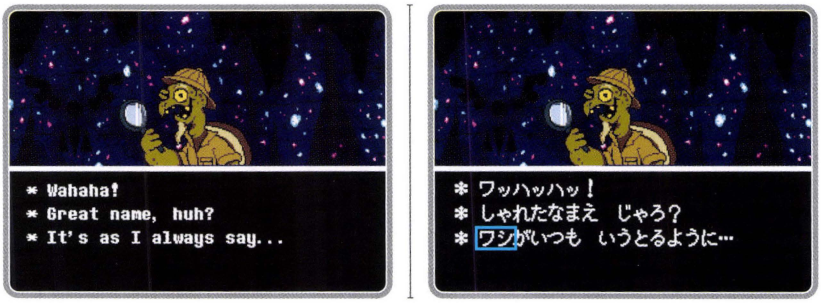
＊ う〜ら〜め〜
＊ し〜や〜う〜
＊ ら〜め〜し〜〜や　う〜

In early drafts of the translation, Napstablook sang all-new Japanese lyrics when listening to this spooktune

As the final draft of the Japanese translation began to solidify, Toby requested that the *uremishiya* lyrics be changed back to "oo" sounds to properly match the actual "oo" sound effects that accompany the music.

Gerson Speaks

Gerson uses the pronoun ワシ (washi), which is associated with elderly characters in Japanese entertainment



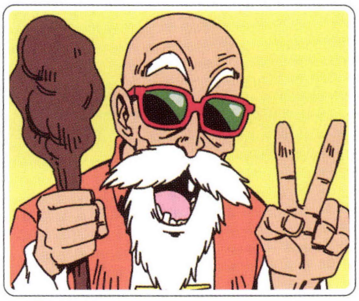
* Wahaha!
* Great name, huh?
* It's as I always say...

＊ ワッハッハッ！
＊ しゃれたなまえ じゃろ？
＊ ワシがいつも いうとるように…

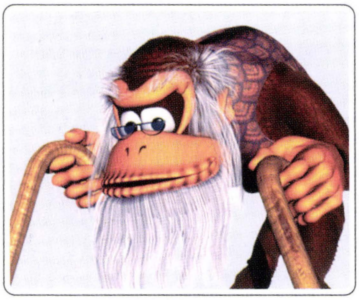
An elderly turtle named Gerson runs a shop in Waterfall. In English, he speaks like a kooky old man. This attribute was retained in Japanese by giving him an equivalent "stereotypical old person" speaking style. Gerson also uses the Japanese pronoun *washi*, which is commonly used by old characters in Japanese entertainment.

Japanese Personal Pronouns: *washi*

In everyday Japanese, the personal pronoun *washi* is strongly associated with older people and parts of western Japan. In Japanese entertainment, *washi* can also lend a very "traditional Japanese culture" vibe to samurai warriors, sumo wrestlers, etc. Some familiar *washi* users include:



Master Roshi
(*Dragon Ball* series)

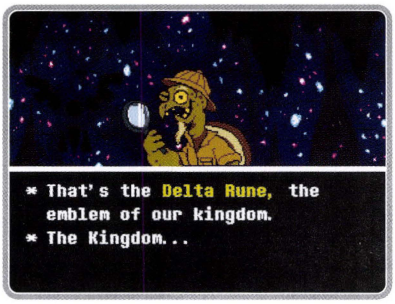


Cranky Kong (*Super Donkey Kong/ Donkey Kong Country* series)

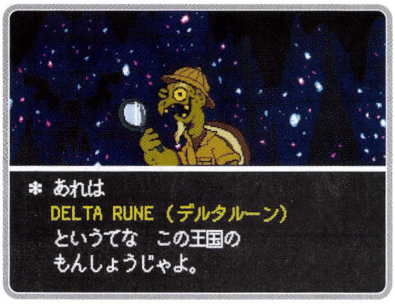
Old Woman in Kakariko Village
(*The Legend of Zelda* series)

E. Honda
(*Street Fighter* series)

Delta Force



* That's the Delta Rune, the emblem of our kingdom.
* The Kingdom...

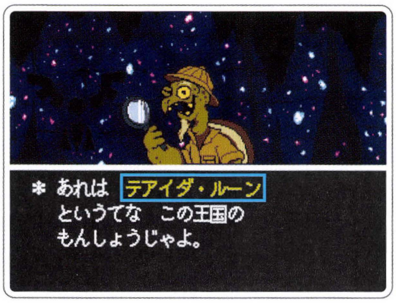


＊ あれは
DELTA RUNE（デルタルーン）
というてな　この王国の
もんしょうじゃよ。

Here's hoping we see *Undertale 11: UNRELATED* and *Undertale 17: NUDER TALE* someday!

Gerson also explains that a reoccurring symbol in the game is called the "Delta Rune". In the translation spreadsheet, Toby left only one short note for the localization team:

> *Delta Rune = anagram for Undertale*



＊ あれは テアイダ・ルーン
というてな　この王国の
もんしょうじゃよ。

Although it's not a real word, テアイダ (*teaida*) could potentially mean "between hands" or "a match-up between two competitors", among other things

At first, the translator paralleled this wordplay by scrambling the word アンダーテイル (*andāteiru*, "Undertale") to create a new Japanese anagram: テアイダ・ルーン (*teaida rūn*, "Teaida Rune"). It's unclear if the name holds any specific meaning, however, as *teaida* isn't a standard Japanese word.

Before *Undertale*'s Japanese release, Toby emphatically requested that "Teida Rune" be changed back to "Delta Rune" and left in English text. This choice preserved the original English anagram. For added measure, and for the Japanese audience's sake, the translator included the Japanese pronunciation of "DELTA RUNE" in parentheses the first time the term is introduced.

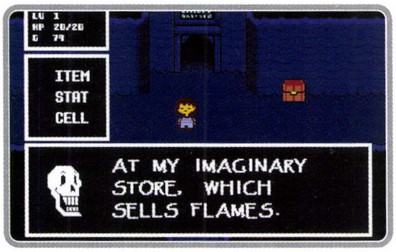
* Kris! There you are! We might still be able to make it!

Deltarune is a sort of alternate universe version of *Undertale* that tells a different story, or something like that

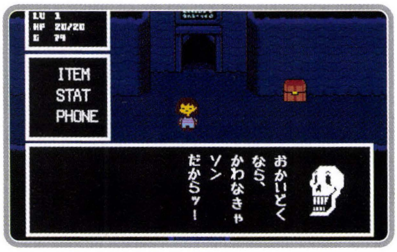
In late 2018, Toby released Chapter 1 of a new game he called *Deltarune*. Suddenly, the anagram connection between "Undertale" and "Delta Rune" became clear to many more fans around the world. Had the Japanese translation of *Undertale* stuck with "Teaida Rune", though, this after-the-fact connection might've been lost in translation.

Hot Stuff

"Stop, drop, and roll" is one of those phrases every kid in America learns over and over at an early age, along with "stranger danger"



AT MY IMAGINARY STORE, WHICH SELLS FLAMES.

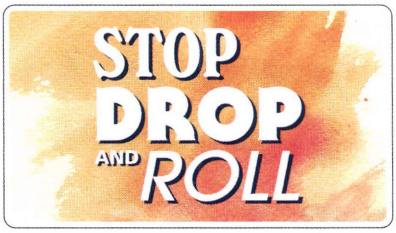


おかいどく
なら、
かわなきゃ
ソン
だからッ！

In English, Papyrus suggests that the player visit Gerson's shop by saying:

> *IF YOU SEE A SHOP, YOU SHOULD STOP... DROP, AND ROLL... INTO SOME GREAT DEALS!! BECAUSE WE'RE HAVING A FIRE SALE!! AT MY IMAGINARY STORE, WHICH SELLS FLAMES.*

I heard "stop, drop, and roll" so often as a kid that it almost felt like catching on fire was a common problem we'd all face daily when we grew up – same with quicksand, too



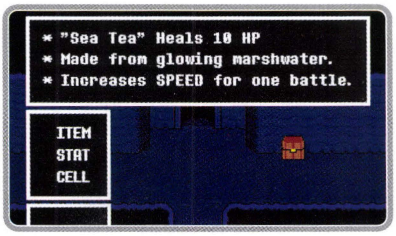
In some English-speaking regions, children are taught the phrase "stop, drop, and roll" as a way to remember what to do if their clothes catch on fire. This reference and Papyrus' fire puns would be lost in a literal translation, so the translator adjusted the line:

> *IF YOU SHOULD SPOT A SHOP... GO IN WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT! YOU'RE SURE TO FIND A GREAT BARGAIN! A BARGAIN ON WHAT? HOW SHOULD I KNOW?! BUT ANY BARGAIN IS A MUST-BUY IN MY BOOK!*

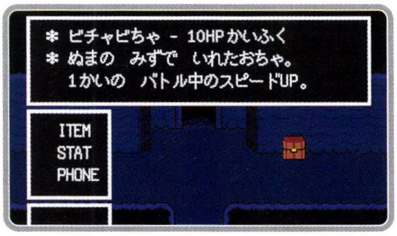
This new line lacks the multiple comedic punches of the original English line, but it still sounds silly and fits Papyrus' "weird yet happy-go-lucky" personality.

Sea of Creativi-Tea

I've seen Japanese fans praise this minor, unimportant item name, which shows that even the smallest things do matter and do get noticed in a localization!



* "Sea Tea" Heals 10 HP
* Made from glowing marshwater.
* Increases SPEED for one battle.



＊ ビチャビちゃ - 10HPかいふく
＊ ぬまの　みずで　いれたおちゃ。
1かいの　バトル中のスピードUP。

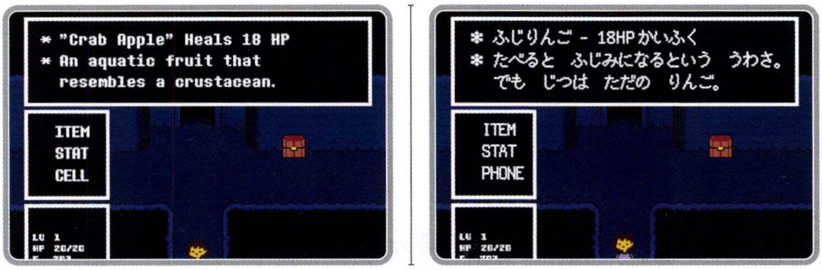
Sokenbicha
爽健美茶
カフェインゼロ

I am a Sokenbicha bottle

Gerson sells a Waterfall-exclusive item named "Sea Tea" in the English script. This name contains a basic rhyme, but no wordplay beyond that.

After some brainstorming, the localization team chose a new name for "Sea Tea": *Bichabi-cha*. This is a play on the Japanese words *cha* ("tea") and *bichabicha* ("sopping wet; soggy"), and was intended to sound like real-life tea brands such as Sōkenbicha. Thus, the Japanese name for "Sea Tea" has a level of wordplay that goes beyond the simple rhyme of the original English name.

Getting Crabby


* "Crab Apple" Heals 18 HP
* An aquatic fruit that
resembles a crustacean.

＊ ふじりんご - 18HPかいふく
＊ たべると ふじみになるという うわさ。
でも じつは ただの りんご。

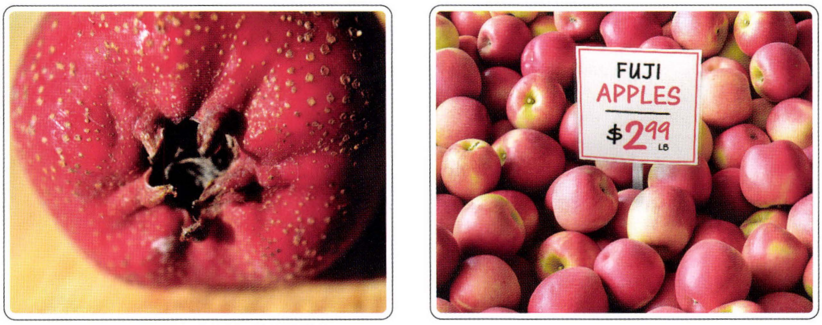
The "Crab Apple" item was renamed to stay funny and understandable for Japanese players

Gerson also sells an item known as the "Crab Apple" in the English script. The item's description is:

> *An aquatic fruit that resembles a crustacean.*

Crab apples (sometimes spelled "crabapples") are a real thing – they're essentially a type of wild apple. They look like smaller versions of regular apples and tend to be very sour or bitter. So the joke here is that Crab Apples in *Undertale* are literal crab-shaped apples, rather than the real-life crab apples that savvy players might envision.

The English wordplay that connects the "Crab Apple" name and its description would be lost in a literal translation, so the localization team relied on a more creative solution: combining the words *fujimi* ("immortality") and *ringo* ("apple"). The resulting name, *Fujiringo*, usually means "Fuji apple" in everyday Japanese, but instead means "immortality apple" in this specific, unexpected context.



LEFT: Crab apples do seem to have a fitting name

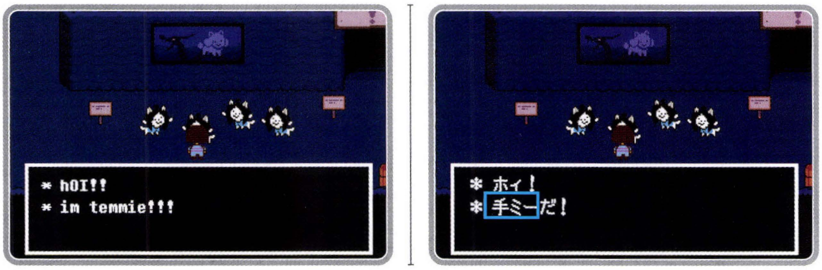
RIGHT: Fuji apples are named after Fujisaki, the city they originate from

Naturally, changing the item's name meant that the original item description would no longer make sense, so the translator gave it an all-new description:

> *Rumored to grant immortality when eaten. But it's actually just a normal apple.*

From all of this, we can see that the localized item name follows the ideas of the original item name: it contains wordplay, remains apple-themed, and matches the name of a type of real-life apple. At the same time, however, the Japanese name lacks the original's aquatic theme shared by many items found in Waterfall.

Temmies Speak


* hOI!!
* im temmie!!!

* ホイ！
* 手ミーだ！

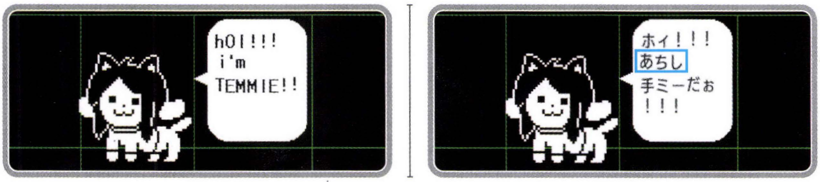
Although both names are pronounced *temi* in Japanese, Temmies humorously misspell their names 手ミー instead of テミー

A strange area named Temmie Village exists in Waterfall. Unsurprisingly, almost every monster living in Temmie Village is named "Temmie". These Temmie characters look unusual, behave strangely, and speak in a unique way.

In the English script, Temmies often call themselves "temmie", "TEMMIE", or "tEMMIE" – capitalization seemingly has no meaning for them. In other instances, Temmies simply call themselves "tem". To replicate this unusual English wordplay, the translator devised a simple system:

1. When "Temmie" is spelled correctly in the English script, the Japanese script should use the properly spelled name テミー (*temī*)
2. When "Temmie" is misspelled, the Japanese script should use the misspelled name 手ミー (*temī*) instead

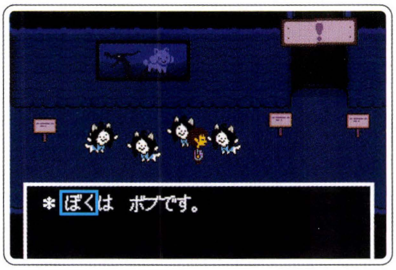
Basically, both Japanese names for "Temmie" are pronounced the same, but the misspelled name mixes two Japanese writing systems in an unexpected way. The resulting misspelling, which combines the *kanji* character 手 (*te*, "hand") with the *katakana* characters ミー (*mī*), is bizarre, funny, and memorable.


hOI!!!
i'm
TEMMIE!!

ホィ！！！
あちし
手ミーだぉ
！！！

Temmies use the feminine pronoun あちし (*achishi*)

In English, Temmies sound like hyperactive, energetic girls. In Japanese, Temmies use a variety of unique speech patterns to sound equally hyperactive and energetic. And although they don't use pronouns very often, Temmies in the Japanese script use the youthful and feminine personal pronoun *achishi*.

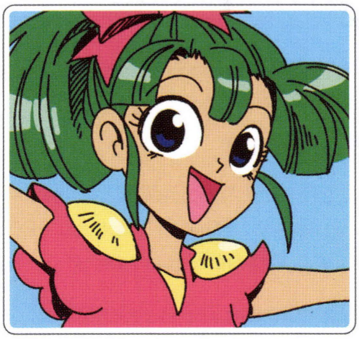

* ぼくは　ボブです。

Bob speaks more like a normal person in Japanese and uses the boyish pronoun ぼく (*boku*)

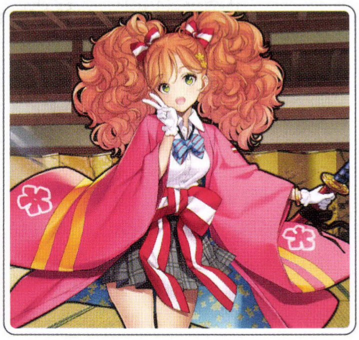
In the English script, one unusual Temmie uses proper grammar and introduces himself as "Bob". For the Japanese script, the translator left Bob's name as-is, and gave him a polite, grammatically correct speech pattern. As part of this, Bob uses the boyish pronoun *boku*.

Japanese Personal Pronouns: *achishi*

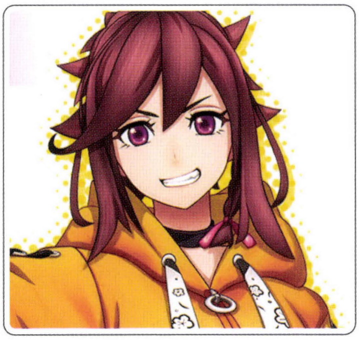
In standard Japanese, the informal personal pronoun *achishi* is a part of some regional dialects, but has generally begun to fall out of use. In Japanese entertainment, *achishi* is commonly associated with feminine characters with youthful energy. Other fictional characters who use *achishi* include:



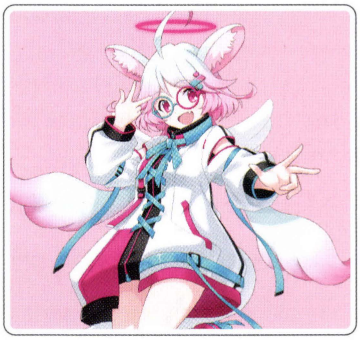
Himiko Shinobibe
(*Mashin Eiyūden Wataru* series)



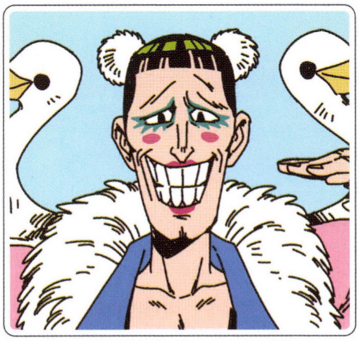
Ryōma Sakamoto
(*Eiyū*Senki* series)



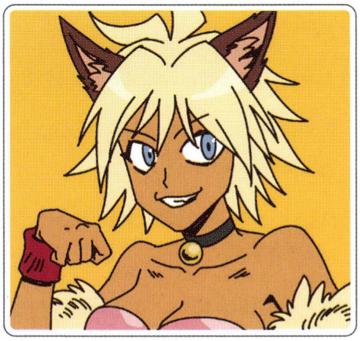
Moemi Washu
(*Sakura Kakumei*)



Gyaraco
(*SHOW BY ROCK!! Fes A Live*)



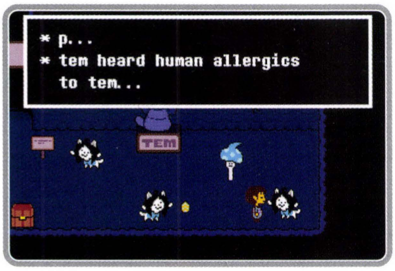
Mr. 2/Bentham
(*One Piece* series)



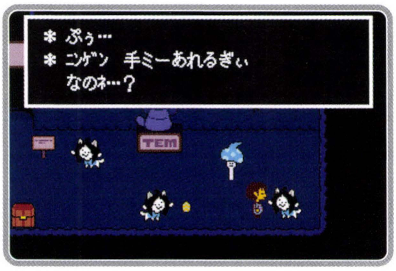
Chaton
(*MÄR* series)

Gramatically Temmie

Note that "Temminese" is just an unofficial name I made up for convenience's sake – I've never heard anyone say it before, not even Toby



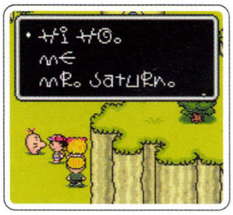
* p...
* tem heard human allergics
to tem...



＊ぷぅ…
＊ニンゲン　手ミーあれるぎぃ
なのネ…？

In English, the Temmies speak in "Temminese" – an extremely unique dialect that can be described as an absolute disaster of the English language. Toby's explanation to the localization staff offers some details:

> *Temmies are based off of how my friend Temmie talks, which is to say with a lot of typos and weird phrases. Kind of like Mr. Saturn I guess but more like chatspeak. Temmies are generally all girls besides Bob I think.*



• Hi Ho.
Me
Mr. Saturn.

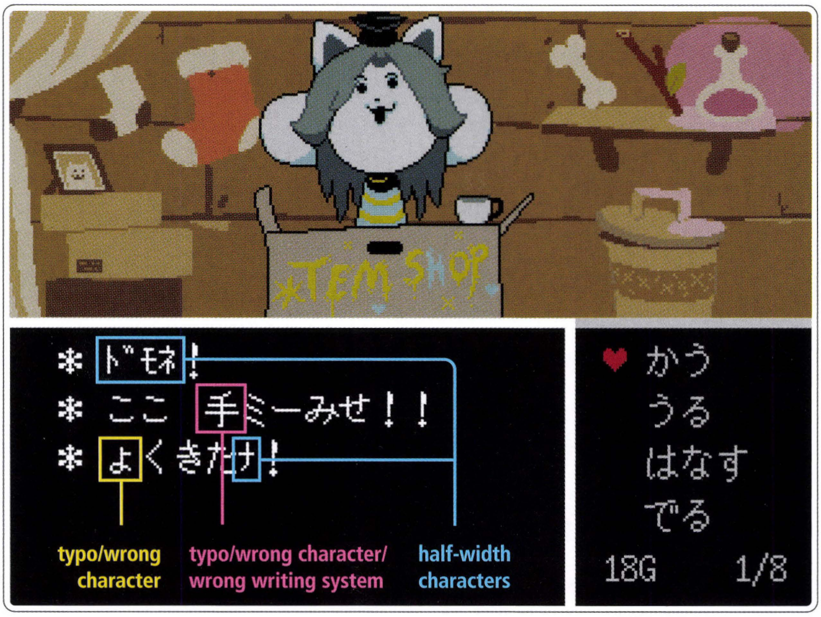
In *EarthBound*, beings known as "Mr. Saturn" speak strangely and with a weird font

In short, Temminese makes Temmies sounds hyper-energetic, excitable, upbeat, and positive. These qualities, combined with their butchering of the English language, make the Temmies' dialogue funny, endearing, and quotable.

This unique butchery of the English language would be lost in a straightforward translation into Japanese. But because Temmies are so memorable and strange, the localization team spent weeks on creating a solid, Japanese equivalent of English Temminese. The resulting Japanese speech style included:

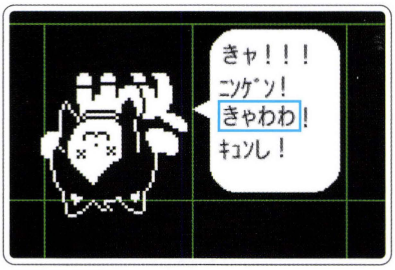
- Having Temmies use hyper, cute, teenage girl-like speech styles
- Having Temmies make amusing and bizarre word choices
- Breaking Japanese grammar non-stop
- Misspelling things in amusing and surprising ways
- Unexpectedly switching between the *hiragana* and *katakana* writing systems
- Using *hiragana* and *katakana* in ways that no normal person would use them
- Using *hiragana* and *katakana* in ways that are potentially unpronounceable
- Mixing half-width Japanese characters with full-width Japanese characters

By incorporating these language quirks into the Temmies' dialogue, the localization team ensured that Temmies sound hyper, cute, upbeat, earnest, and unique in Japanese, while also sounding weird, goofy, slightly annoying, and unintelligent. In short, Temmies are as memorable in the Japanese version of *Undertale* as they are in the English release.

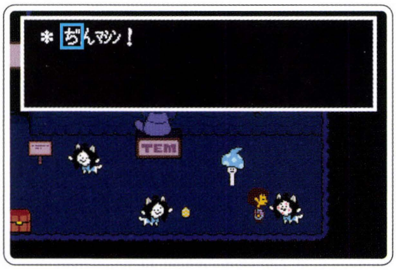

＊ ﾄﾞﾓﾈ!
＊ ここ 手ミーみせ！！
＊ よくきたﾅ!

かう
うる
はなす
でる
18G 1/8

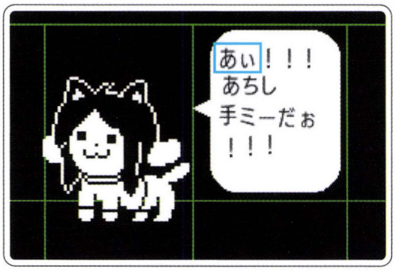
The Japanese script combines a variety of language tricks to reinforce the idea that Temmies speak unlike any other character in the game


きャ！！！
ﾆﾝｹﾞﾝ!
きゃわわ!
ｷｭﾝし！

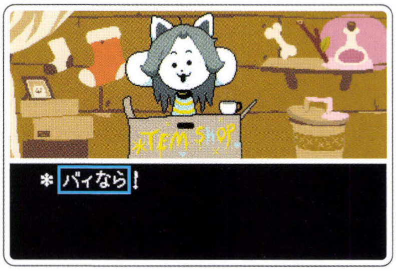
By making up new words and distorting existing words, Temmies come across as hyperactive girls in Japanese – in this example, a Temmie says *kyawawa* instead of *kawaii* ("cute")


＊ ぢんﾏｼﾝ！

Temmies use unusual spelling choices, such as using ぢ (*ji*) instead of じ (*ji*). Both are pronounced the same, but the former isn't commonly seen in written Japanese these days, outside of a few specific situations


あぃ！！！
あちし
手ミーだぉ
！！！

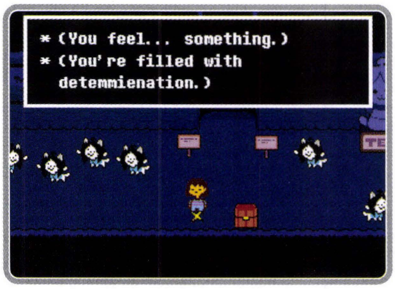
In early drafts of the translation, the English Temmie greeting of "hOI" became *ai* in Japanese, which isn't a normal word in this context. On Toby's request, the team changed every *ai* back to *hoi* – but missed this single *ai* in battle

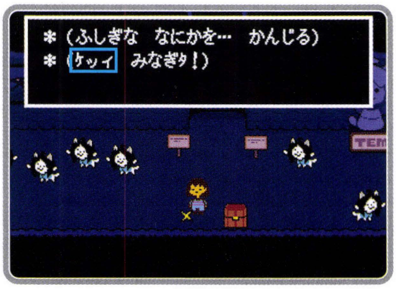

＊ バィなら!

In English, Temmies say "bOI!!" when saying goodbye. In Japanese, they say "Bye-nara!", a combination of the English word "bye" and the Japanese word *sayōnara*

Determination Migration

As per Temminese grammar rules, the word ケツイ (*ketsui*) in this line is spelled improperly as ケッィ. It's such a weird spelling that I'm not even sure how to pronounce it!


* (You feel... something.)
* (You're filled with detemmienation.)


＊（ふしぎな　なにかを…　かんじる）
＊（ケッィ　みなぎり！）

In English, using the save point in Temmie Village results in the message:

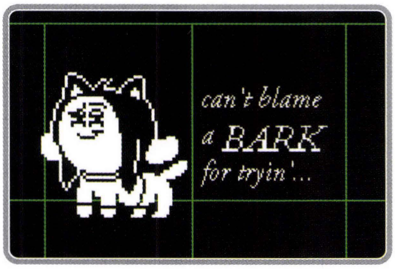
> *(You feel... something.)*
> *(You're filled with detemmienation.)*

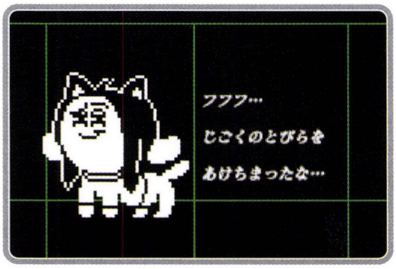
The word "detemmienation" in this message is a combination of the word "determination" – a key term in *Undertale*'s story – and the name "Temmie".

Because the Japanese script translates "determination" as *ketsui*, this line's wordplay would be lost in a straightforward translation. To get around this obstacle, the translator replaced "you're filled with **detemmienation**" with the Japanese Temminese equivalent of "you're filled with determination". The resulting Japanese line no longer relies on wordplay, but it does remain humorous and Temmie-themed.

Flaking Out

This English text is actually a hand-drawn image and not normal text, so a Japanese image had to be created and added to the game too


can't blame
a BARK
for tryin'...


フフフ…
じごくのとびらを
あけちまったな…

If the player refuses to give Temmie Flakes to a Temmie in battle, Temmie says "can't blame a BARK for tryin'..." in English as a funny tune plays. In his notes, Toby explained this line and his vision for the Japanese equivalent:

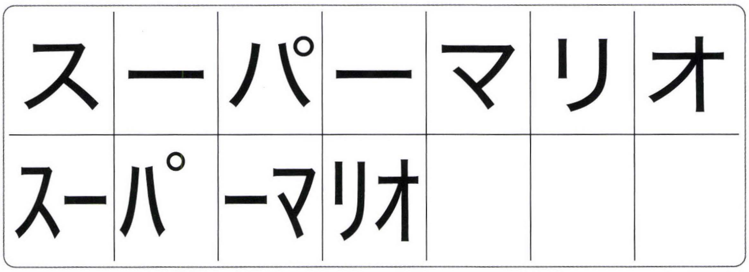
> *Pretty much a meaningless/nonsense phrase, though the idea is "you can't blame me for trying (to get those temmie flakes)." temmie makes a special face during this action. Honestly it might be interesting if this was completely changed, including her face, for absolutely no reason, as one of those translation mysteries like, if her face became very manly and she just says "You have entered the pit of hell..."*

Using this information, the translator changed the Temmie line to say "heh... you've just opened the gates to hell" in an assertive, masculine tone in Japanese.

Japanese Half-width Characters

In standard written Japanese, most characters share the same size and adhere to a grid format. In computer lingo, these are sometimes referred to as "full-width characters".

For various technical and historical reasons, early Japanese computing systems used "half-width characters". These squished characters allowed two characters to fit in the space of one standard character. This came at a cost, however: the half-width character set only supports one Japanese writing system: *katakana.*

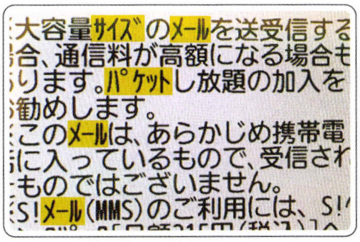


スーパーマリオ

ｽｰﾊﾟｰﾏﾘｵ

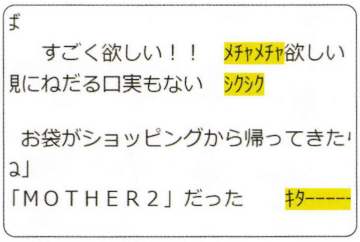
Here, we see the name "Super Mario" written in full-width Japanese and in half-width Japanese

Today, modern technology and robust text encoding standards have made half-width characters mostly obsolete, although they still appear in a handful of ways:



大容量ｻｲｽﾞのﾒｰﾙを送受信する
合、通信料が高額になる場合も
ります。ﾊﾟｹｯﾄし放題の加入を
勧めします。
このﾒｰﾙは、あらかじめ携帯電
に入っているもので、受信され
ものではございません。
S!ﾒｰﾙ(MMS)のご利用には、S!

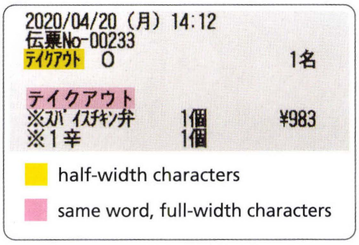
Older mobile phones and devices with small screens



ず
すごく欲しい！！　ﾒﾁｬﾒﾁｬ欲しい
見にねだる口実もない　ｼｸｼｸ

お袋がショッピングから帰ってきた
る」
「ＭＯＴＨＥＲ２」だった　ｷﾀｰｰｰｰｰ

Internet slang, particularly during the 2000s



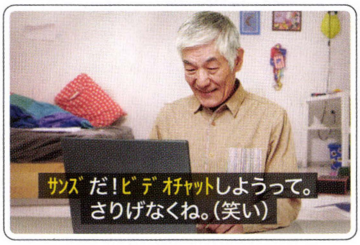
2020/04/20（月）14:12
伝票No-00233
ﾃｲｸｱｳﾄ　0　1名

テイクアウト
※ｽﾊﾞｲｽﾁｷﾝ弁　1個　¥983
※1辛　1個

🟨 half-width characters

🟪 same word, full-width characters

Cash register receipts

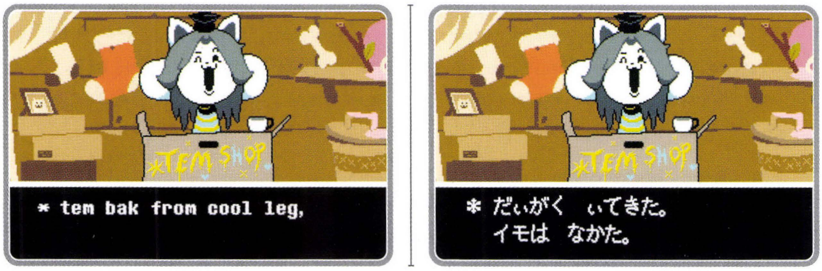


ｻﾝｽﾞだ!ﾋﾞﾃﾞｵﾁｬｯﾄしようって。
さりげなくね。(笑い)

Video subtitles

Given the limited use of half-width characters today, it's fascinating to see them being used to stylize character dialogue in a video game!

Diploma Meal



* tem bak from cool leg,

* だぃがく ぃてきた。
イモは なかた。

Here's hoping they release *Undertale*-brand cool legs and sweet potatoes someday

One Temmie has opened a shop to earn enough money to attend college someday. But, because Temmies are scatterbrained and speak oddly, this Temmie regularly misspells the English word "college".

In one scene, purchasing an expensive item results in this text:

> *WOA!! thas ALOT o muns... can tem realy acepts...*
> *OKs!!!! tem go to colleg and make u prouds!!!*
> *[...]*
> *tem bak from cool leg, tem learn MANY THINs, learn to sell new ITEM! yayA!!!*

This bizarre misspelling of "college" as "cool leg" quickly became a fan-favorite quote among English-speaking players. The joke would be lost in a straightforward translation, however, so the translator replaced it with a funny cultural reference that would make sense to Japanese players:

> *wENt to colLEge. poTAtOes not there.*

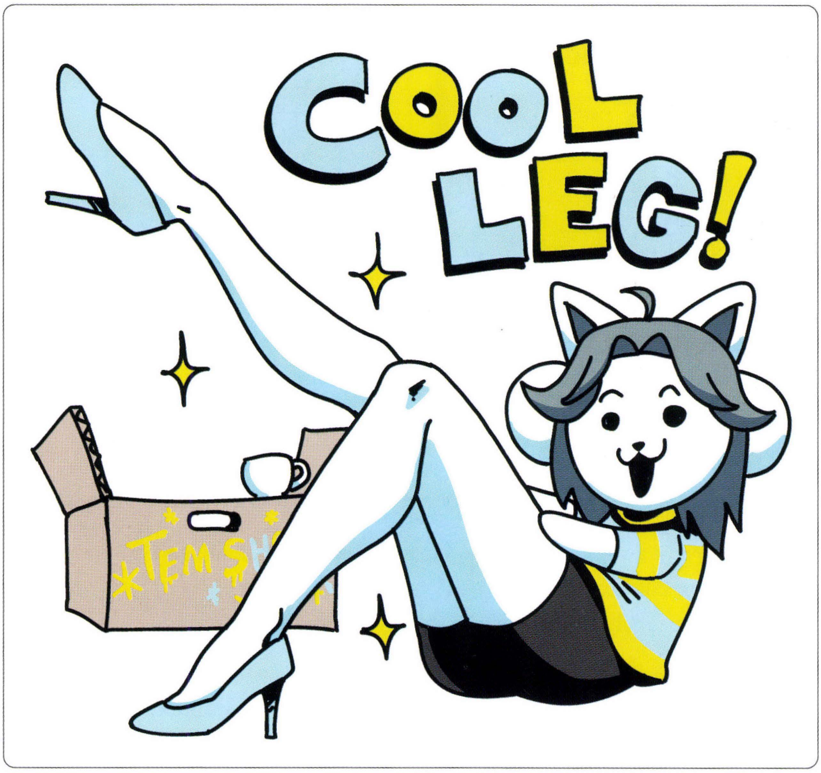
This is a humorous reference to a famous food in Japan called *daigaku imo,* which translates as "college potato" or "university potato". *Daigaku imo* is basically deep-fried sweet potato covered with a hard sugar coating. It first gained popularity in the 1900s as an inexpensive, but filling meal for Japanese university students, and has since become a standard dish that can be found in countless recipe books, restaurants, and food stalls throughout Japan.

1枚あたり
114 kcal
5%
Nestlé
KitKat
キット・サクラサクよ
大学いも味
期間限定
写真はイメージです

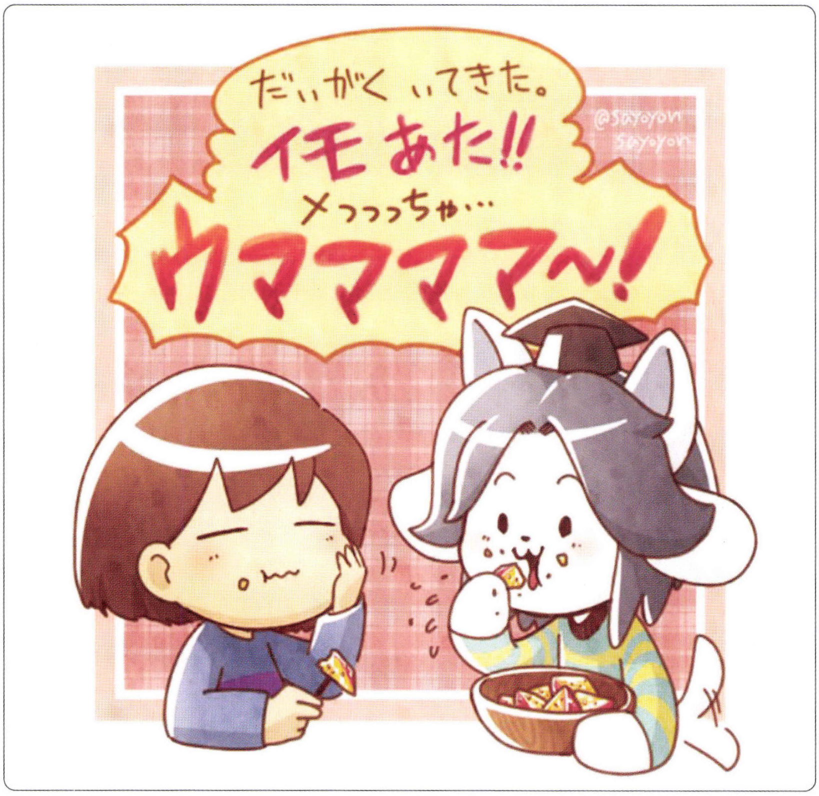
LEFT: *Daigaku imo* is a type of candied sweet potato that can be found all over Japan

RIGHT: *Daigaku imo* is popular enough that *daigaku imo*-flavored snacks and candies exist

As we can see, although this "cool leg" line is completely different in Japanese, it remains as silly as the original line. This change is also why fans outside of Japan draw art about Temmie and legs, while fans in Japan draw Temmie and sweet potatoes.


COOL LEG!
*TEM SH

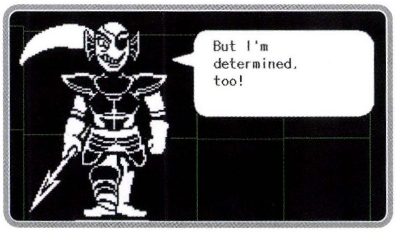
English-speaking *Undertale* fans sometimes draw Temmie with unusual legs as a reference to this "cool leg" scene

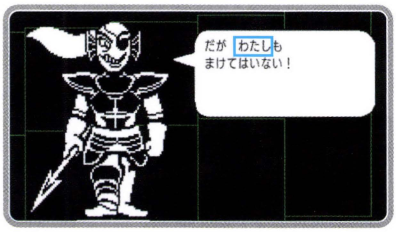

だぃがく ぃってきた。
イモあた!!
メっっっちゃ…
ウママママ〜!
@sayoyon
Sayoyon

If you've ever seen Japanese drawings of Temmie eating weird potato things, now you know why!

Undyne Speaks

Undyne uses the mostly neutral personal pronoun わたし (*watashi*) in Japanese


But I'm
determined,
too!


だが わたしも
まけてはいない！

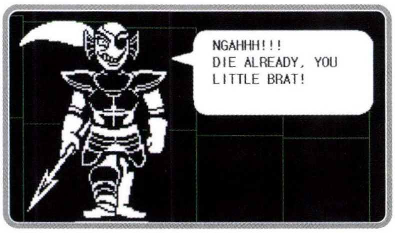
An intimidating knight named Undyne first appears in Waterfall. She loathes the main character at first, but the player can change her attitude over time. As such, Undyne sounds scary and ferocious in some situations, polite and friendly in others, and sometimes all of these things at once. Luckily, Toby provided many notes about Undyne's constant attitude changes.

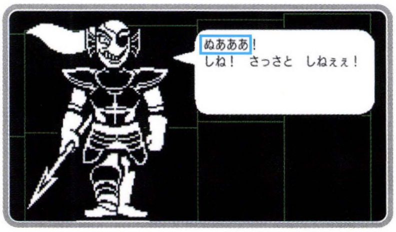
In Japanese, Undyne uses the pronoun *watashi*. This suits her in several ways:

- It conveys a sense of neutral courtesy, professionalism, and honor
- In some contexts it can give off a sense of femininity
- It can be safely used in a wide variety of situations

Of course, other pronouns could've suited Undyne too – one interesting solution might've been to give her a different pronoun to match her different attitudes.

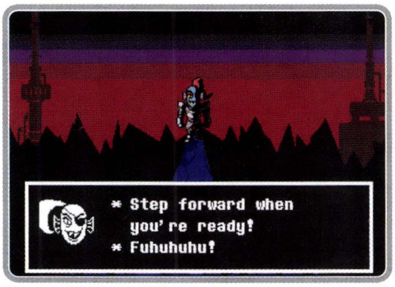
Similar to Papyrus' laugh, Undyne's sound of aggravation was changed slightly for the Japanese script

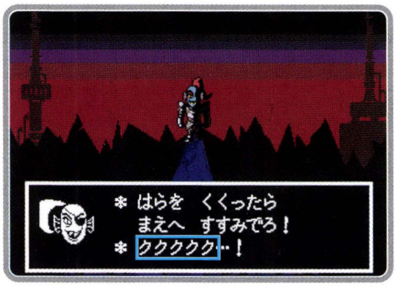

NGAHHH!!!
DIE ALREADY, YOU
LITTLE BRAT!


ぬあああ！
しね！ さっさと しねぇぇ！

In the English script, Undyne often shouts "ngaaaah" when frustrated. Because grunts, growls, and other sounds often "feel" different in different languages, Undyne's growls were translated as *nuaaaa* throughout the Japanese script.

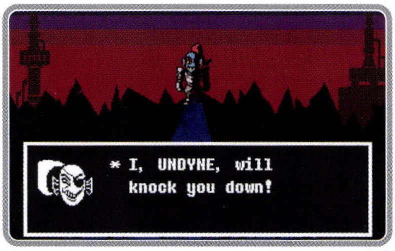
I feel like an analysis of the zillion different sounds of Japanese laughter could fill its own little textbook


* Step forward when
you're ready!
* Fuhuhuhu!

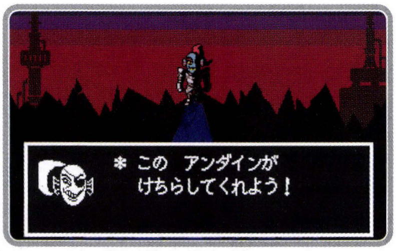

＊ はらを くくったら
まえへ すすみでろ！
＊ ククククク…！

Undyne also tends to laugh when she's confident. In English, this laugh is spelled "fuhuhu". In Japanese, *fuhuhu* is sometimes associated with polite, friendly laughter and cordial giggling, so the translator localized *fuhuhu* as *kukukuku*, which carries a sense of confidence, stubbornness, and/or cunning.

Fatal Fall



* I, UNDYNE, will
knock you down!



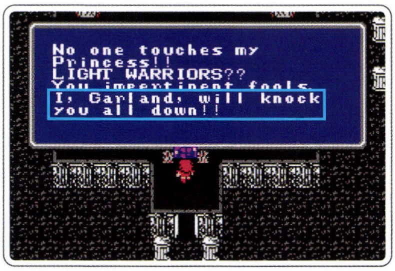
＊ この アンダインが
けちらしてくれよう！

Toby didn't note this reference, so the translator initially missed it, but luckily an American member of the localization team was there to point it out

In the English version of *Undertale*, Undyne shouts at the main character:

> *I, Undyne, will knock you down!*

This laughable threat comes from a famous line in the 1990 English translation of *Final Fantasy:* "I, Garland, will knock you all down!". *Undertale*'s translator retained this reference by quoting the same line from the original Japanese version of *Final Fantasy.*

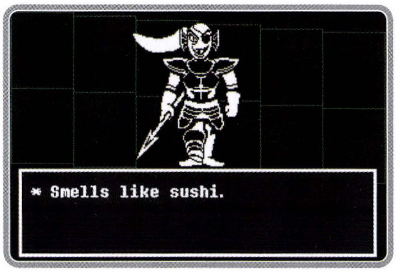


No one touches my
Princess!!
LIGHT WARRIORS??
You impertinent fools.
I, Garland, will knock
you all down!!

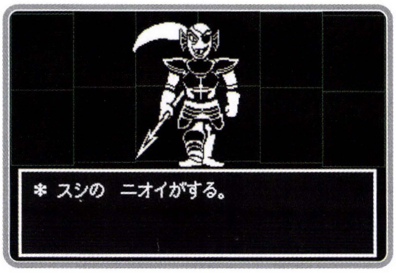
In Japanese, Garland roughly says "I, Garland, will vanquish you!", which makes it less memorable than the awkwardly phrased English translation

However, this *Final Fantasy* quote is famous because of its odd translation – the original Japanese line was normal and unremarkable. For this reason, the *Final Fantasy* reference is less recognizable in Japanese than in English.

Fishy Ideas



* Smells like sushi.

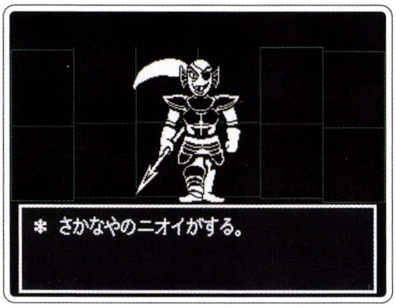


＊ スシの ニオイがする。

In Japanese, *sushi* technically refers to a type of vinegared rice rather than raw fish, meaning there are genuine, authentic, non-fish types of *sushi* if you don't like fish (*inari* is my favorite!)

The text "smells like sushi" will occasionally appear while fighting Undyne. This humorous reference to raw fish makes sense, given that Undyne is a fish monster.

At first, the translator changed "smells like sushi" to "smells like a fish market" and explained that Japanese players are more likely to associate the smell of sushi with vinegared rice rather than raw fish. Much later, Toby noted that "smells like sushi" is a fan-favorite quote and asked that it be reinstated in Japanese.

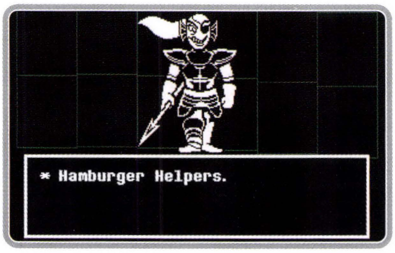


＊ さかなやのニオイがする。

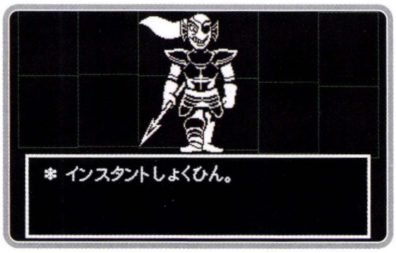
This line was originally localized as "smells like a fish market" to better retain the joke about Undyne being a fish monster, but it was un-localized due to external influences

Dinner for Two

Note that these screenshots are mock-ups and not real



* Hamburger Helpers.



＊ インスタントしょくひん。

Hamburger
HELPER
SPAGHETTI
ADD GROUND BEEF

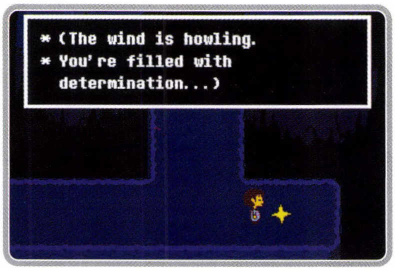
Hamburger Helper is a popular meal preparation kit with a weird hand for a mascot

The translation spreadsheet includes an odd line related to the Undyne battle that simply says "Hamburger Helpers". Toby noted that this line seems to be unused in the actual game. It's likely an old error message he used while developing *Undertale*. Still, the translator localized it just to be safe.

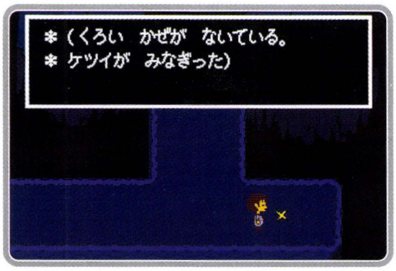
Hamburger Helper is an American packaged food product meant to simplify the meal-cooking process – the purchaser only needs to add hamburger meat before cooking. Because Hamburger Helper isn't widely known in Japan, however, the *Undertale* translator changed this line to say "Instant Food" instead.

Ominous Wind

The villainous Magus can be befriended in *Chrono Trigger*, just as the antagonistic Undyne can be befriended in *Undertale* – maybe this is partly what inspired Toby to quote Magus here



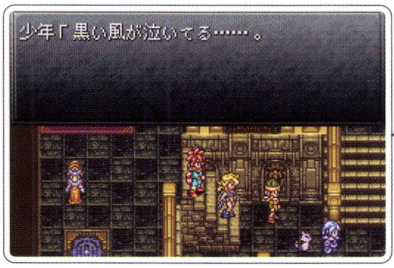
* (The wind is howling.
* You're filled with
determination...)



＊（くろい　かぜが　ないている。
＊ ケツイが　みなぎった）

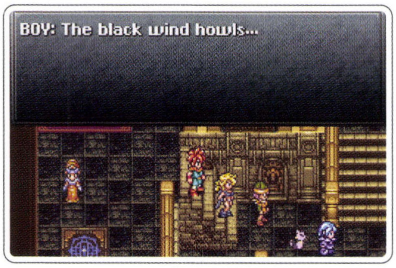
The phrase "the wind is howling" appears before, during, and after the battle with Undyne. Toby included this short, ominous message as a reference to the classic Japanese RPG *Chrono Trigger*. In the game, a villain named Magus shares two memorable lines: "the black wind begins to blow" and "the black wind howls".

Chrono Trigger features memorable lines about howling black wind



少年「黒い風が泣いてる……。

Chrono Trigger (Japan)



BOY: The black wind howls...

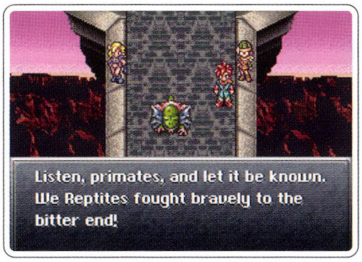
Chrono Trigger (North America)

Because Magus' lines are slightly different in Japanese and English, the *Undertale* translator replaced Toby's indirect reference with a direct quote to keep the reference recognizable for Japanese players.

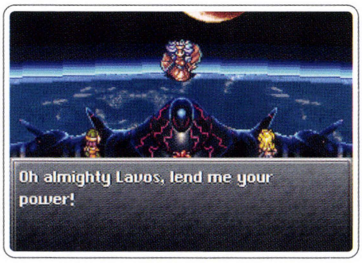
Inspiration Spotlight: *Chrono Trigger*

CHRONO TRIGGER
Official Nintendo Seal of Quality
KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
AGES 6+
SOLD BY
SQUARESOFT
SUPER NINTENDO
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

SUPER FAMICOM
LICENSED BY NINTENDO
XII
IX
VI
CHRONO TRIGGER
クロノ・トリガー
TM
SQUARESOFT



Listen, primates, and let it be known. We Reptites fought bravely to the bitter end!

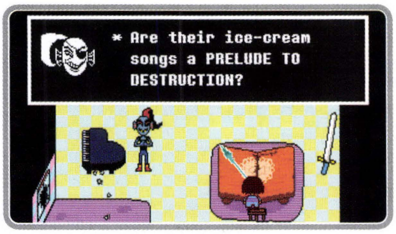


Oh almighty Lavos, lend me your power!

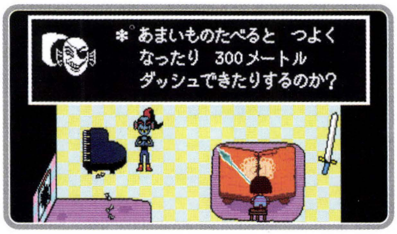
In 1995, Square released *Chrono Trigger* for the Japanese Super Famicom and the North American Super NES. This classic, influential Japanese RPG introduced new gameplay concepts not found in its contemporaries, including time-travel mechanics, branching storylines, and multi-character battle techniques. As the product of a dream team of game developers, *Chrono Trigger* enjoyed commercial and critical success upon release, and remains well regarded to this day.

Power of Sugar

Reader Challenge #6: Create your own "death to the enemy" lyrics for an ice cream truck song



* Are their ice-cream
songs a PRELUDE TO
DESTRUCTION?



＊あまいものたべると　つよく
なったり　300メートル
ダッシュできたりするのか？

Undyne offers the main character a drink. Options include tea, hot chocolate, soda, and a cup of sugar. If the player selects the cup of sugar, Undyne says in English:

> *I'm not gonna give you a cup of sugar! What do I look like, the ice-cream woman? Do human ice-cream women TERRORIZE HUMANITY with ENERGY SPEARS? Are their ice-cream songs a PRELUDE TO DESTRUCTION?*

The joke here is part of a larger running gag: Undyne imagines the human world to be just like what's depicted in fiction-based anime and manga. And in this scene, she equates happy ice cream truck music with a human warrior's "death to the enemy" song.

Although ice cream trucks represent a commonly shared cultural experience in many Western countries, they're culturally insignificant in Japan. This left the localization team in a tough situation: Undyne's line needs to be related to sugar, a literal translation wouldn't make much sense, and there's no strong equivalent to musical ice cream trucks in Japanese culture. For this reason, early drafts of the Japanese scripts had Undyne talk about how warriors in the human world surely sell ice cream and work in ice cream shops.

Later, a localization team member noted that Undyne's new line felt too plain in comparison to the original. The line was then updated to suggest that human warriors surely eat ice cream before charging into battle.

Soon after, another team member suggested replacing the ice cream truck with a food vehicle that *is* more common in Japan: a *yakiimo* ("roasted sweet potato") truck. This idea was dropped, however, because it lacked a clear, logical connection to normal sugar.

After even more discussion, the translator changed Undyne's line to reference a classic Japanese snack instead of ice cream trucks:

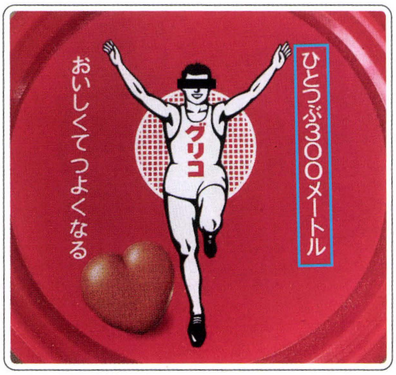
> *Who the hell pours sugar into a cup and offers it to a guest?! What, do you plan on sipping it with a spoon or something? I mean, I've heard of people with a sweet-tooth before, but this is on a different level. Or do sweets on the surface world make you strong, let you sprint for 300 meters, and other stuff like that?*

This new text refers to Japanese Glico-brand snacks and their two timeless slogans: "makes you strong" and "300 meters in a single piece".

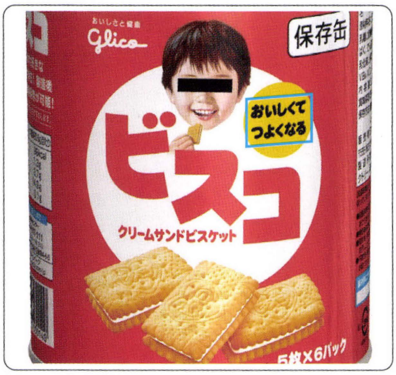
OLYMPIC
Softee
SHAKES
SUNDAES
CONES
BANANA BOAT
Always Fresh
COLD POP
BANANA SUNDAES

Nothing stops kids in their tracks like an approaching ice cream truck or the sound of someone yelling "ice cream truck!"

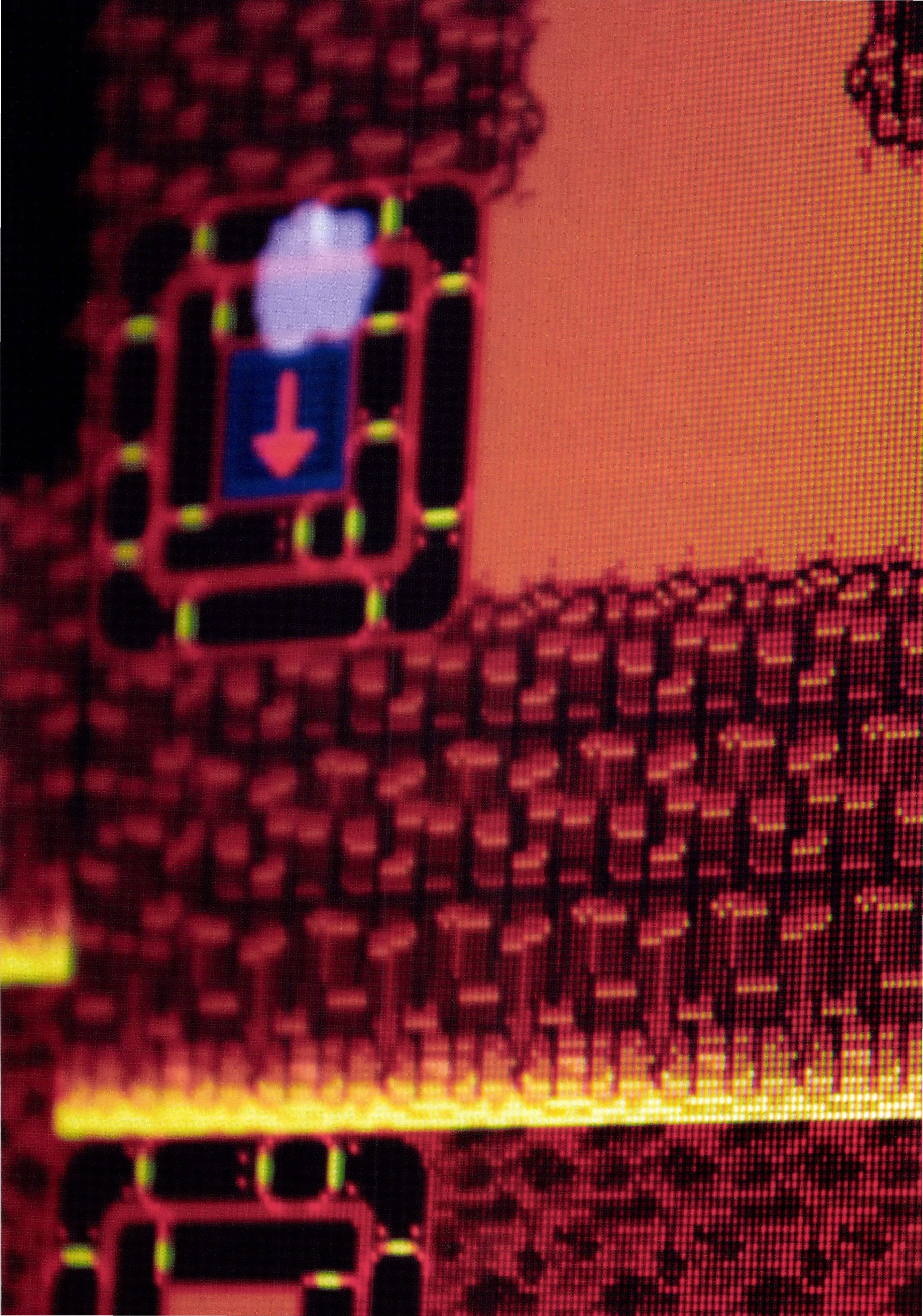
In Japan, some *yakiimo* trucks drive around and sell roasted sweet potatoes to passersby

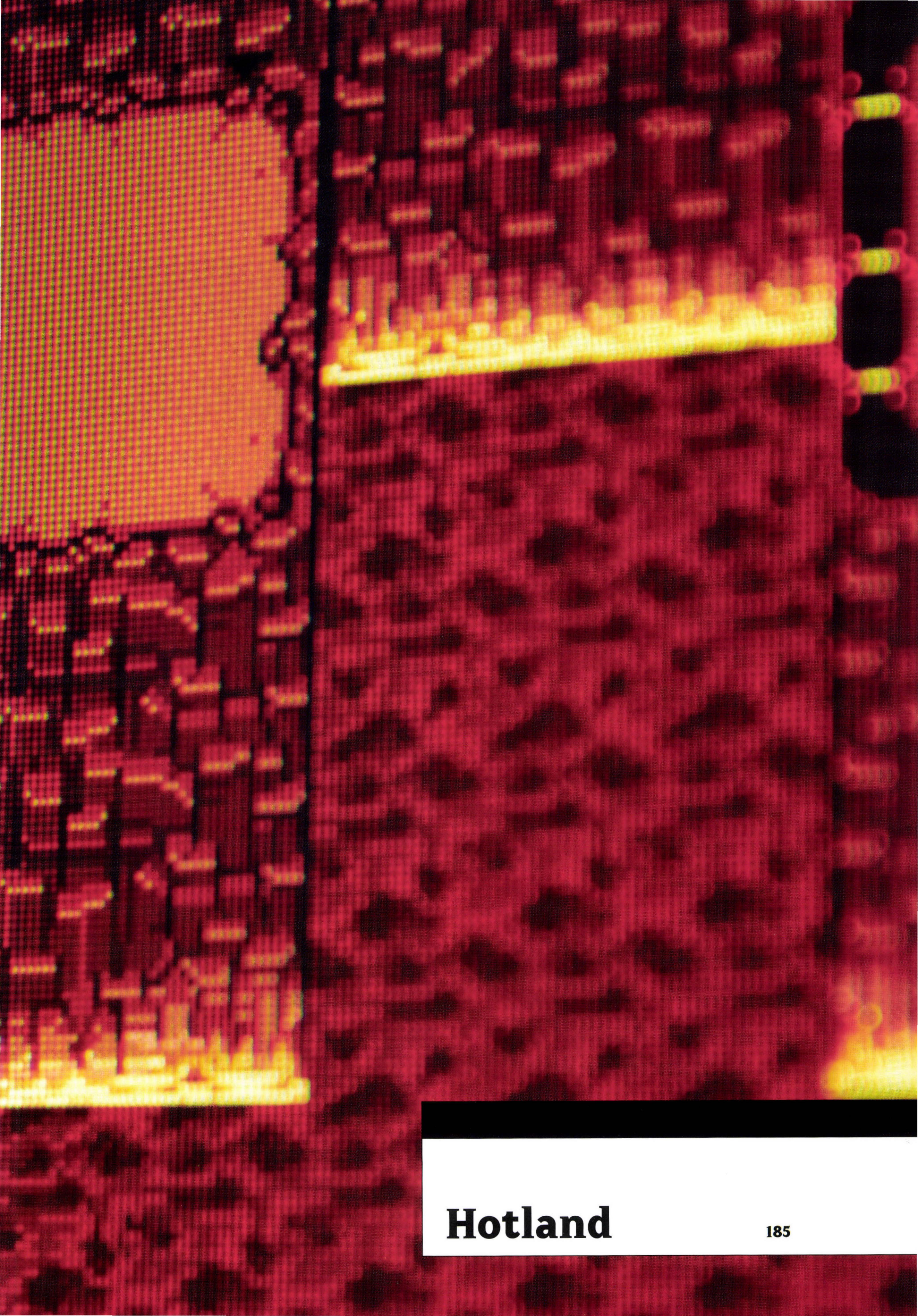

ひとつぶ300メートル
おいしくてつよくなる
グリコ

This classic Glico slogan says "300 meters in a single piece"


Glico
保存缶
おいしくて
つよくなる
ビスコ
クリームサンドビスケット
5枚×6パック

This other classic slogan says "delicious, and makes you strong"





Hotland

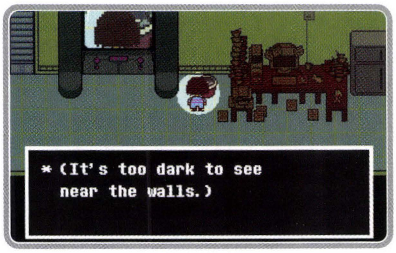
Hotland

Human Intruder Encounters Monster Machines

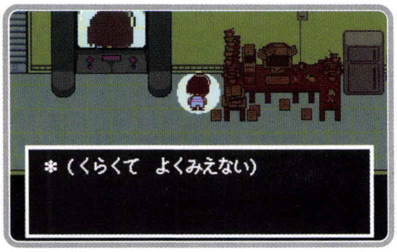
The next step of the journey takes the main character to a lava-filled region packed with new characters, new surprises, and a pitch-dark laboratory.

A Stab in the Dark

Toby really liked this line from *Brandish* and included multiple notes about it in the translation spreadsheet



* (It's too dark to see near the walls.)

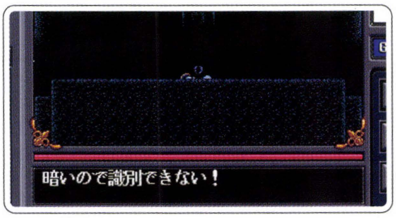


＊（くらくて　よくみえない）

If the player checks the lab's dark walls in the English version of *Undertale*, the game will state that "it's too dark to see near the walls".

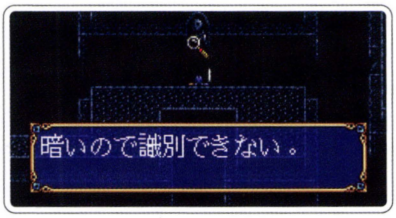
Toby noted that this generic "there's nothing here" line is actually a direct quote from *Brandish*. He also mentioned that it wasn't important to retain the quote in the Japanese *Undertale* script. Even so, the translator did some research and included the equivalent quote from a Japanese version of *Brandish*.

The Japanese version of *Brandish* has been re-released many times over the past thirty years. Because each version has slightly different text, there is no single "too dark to see" line in Japanese – the line is different in each release. Of these, the Japanese version of *Undertale* quotes the PC Engine port of *Brandish*:



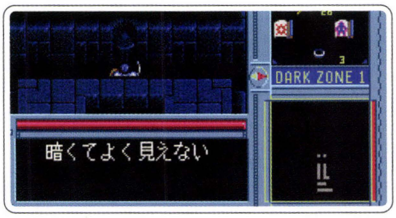
暗いので識別できない！

"Can't identify due to the darkness!"
(PC98, 1991)



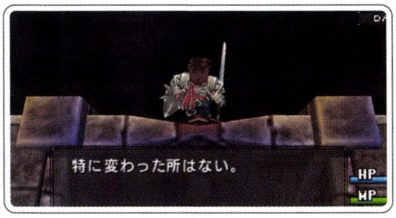
暗いので識別できない。

"Can't identify due to the darkness."
(Super Famicom, 1994)



暗くてよく見えない

"It's too dark to see well"
(PC Engine, 1994)



特に変わった所はない。

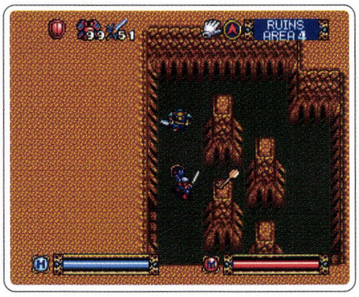
"Nothing unusual here."
(PSP, 2009)

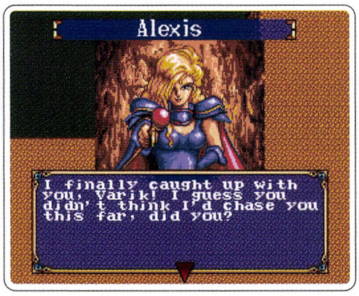
In short, it's clear that this generic English line is very important to Toby, and that the localization team took that importance seriously.

Inspiration Spotlight: *Brandish*

Official Nintendo Seal of Quality
UNLOCK THE UNDERWORLD!
Brandish
KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
AGES 6+
SOLD BY
KOEI
SUPER NINTENDO
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

KOEI
Super Famicom
Brandish
ブランディッシュ


RUINS
AREA 4

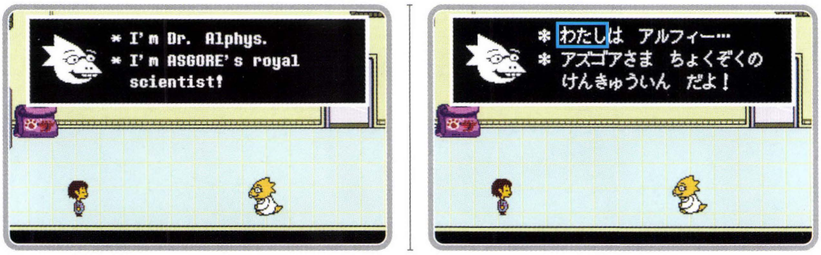


I finally caught up with you, Varik! I guess you didn't think I'd chase you this far, did you?

In 1991, Nihon Falcom released *Brandish* for the NEC PC-98 series of Japanese home computers. The game's solid popularity among its niche audience led to multiple re-releases, ports, and sequels in Japan. Outside of Japan, the *Brandish* series remains largely unknown.

In simple terms, *Brandish* is a top-down "dungeon crawler" that combines the gameplay mechanics of action, puzzle, and role-playing games. Players are tasked with navigating 45 increasingly complex dungeons filled with monsters, traps, and secrets.

Alphys Speaks


* I'm Dr. Alphys.
* I'm ASGORE's royal scientist!

* わたしは アルフィー…
* アズゴアさま ちょくぞくの
けんきゅういん だよ！

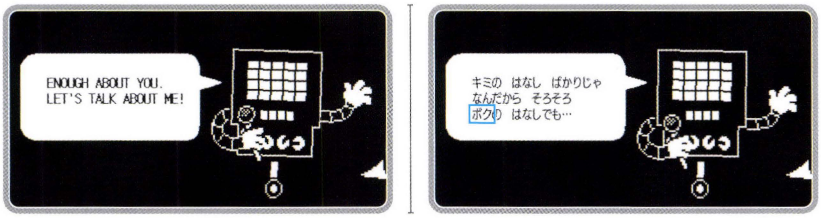
Alphys switches between being confident and being out of her comfort zone, so Toby included many notes about how individual lines should "feel" to the player

Alphys' name change had an unintended side effect: online searches for her Japanese name mostly bring up The Alfee, a 1974 Japanese folk rock band

In the English script, a scientist named Alphys comes across as smart and professional when it comes to her work, but becomes shy, nerdy, and insecure when holding a casual conversation. The translator conveyed these qualities in Japanese by giving Alphys a mixture of casual speech patterns and polite speech patterns that fit her character. Alphys also uses the polite and somewhat feminine pronoun *watashi* when referring to herself.

Early on, Toby noted that "Alphys" should be pronounced "al-feez", which he imagined would be spelled in Japanese as アルフィーズ (*arufīzu*). He also understood that this six-character name could cause problems with Papyrus' vertical text box, which only comfortably allows five characters per line. Thus, per Toby's personal suggestion, Alphys is now known as アルフィー (*arufī*, roughly: "Alphy") in the Japanese script. Naturally, this name change surprised early Japanese fans who were accustomed to seeing Alphys' full name in the fan-made translations.

Mettaton Speaks

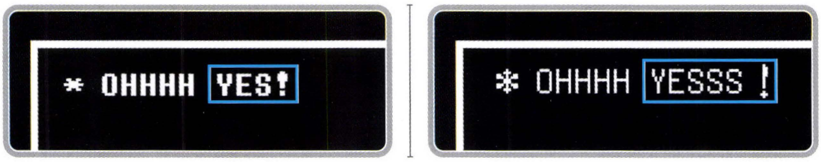

ENOUGH ABOUT YOU.
LET'S TALK ABOUT ME!

キミの はなし ばかりじゃ
なんだから そろそろ
ボクの はなしでも…

Mettaton usually uses the good-natured pronoun *boku* to refer to himself, but switches to the more feminine *watashi* when dressed up as a robot bride later on

A killer robot named Mettaton appears and repeatedly attempts to stop the main character in unusual ways. In English, Mettaton usually speaks like a game show host. He speaks similarly in Japanese, and usually uses the boyish pronoun *boku* to refer to himself.

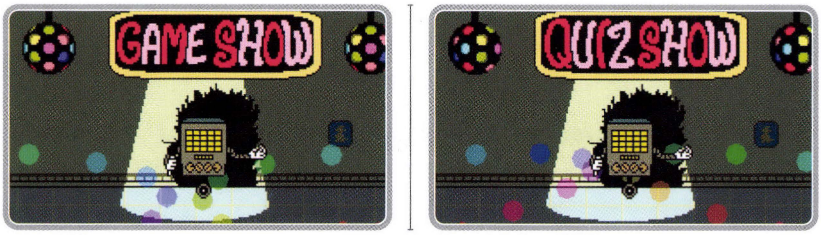
Mettaton's catchphrase in English is "OHHHH YES!!", and he often refers to the main character as "Darling". In the Japanese script, he still says "OHHHH YES!!" in English and calls the main character *koneko-chan* ("kitten").


* OHHHH YES!

* OHHHH YESSS !

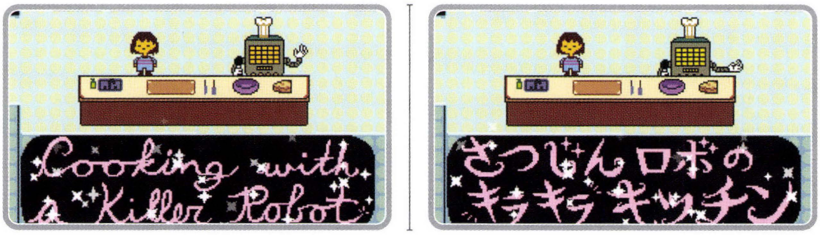
Mettaton's catchphrase is unchanged in Japanese, but was never simply copy-and-pasted during translation

Robot Rebranding



Mettaton refers to this game show as a "quiz show" in English, so the updated Japanese sign is actually more consistent with the game's dialogue

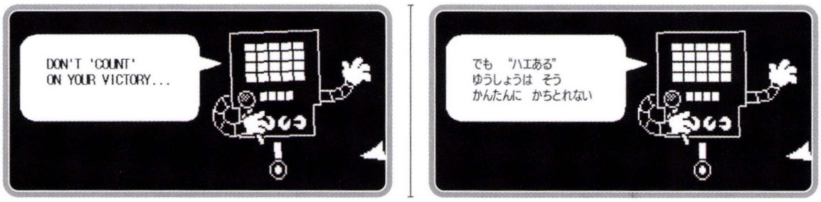
Mettaton forces the main character to participate in a television game show. In the English version of *Undertale*, the game show begins with a flashing sign that says "GAME SHOW". Game shows are usually called "quiz shows" in Japan, though, so the sign was updated to say "QUIZ SHOW" in the Japanese release.



Toby's Japanese friend Moa (the developer behind *Hatoful Boyfriend*) drew this Japanese game show title card and helped check *Undertale*'s localization in general

Later, Mettaton forces the main character to participate in a cooking show. This show begins with a hand-drawn title card that says "COOKING WITH A KILLER ROBOT". Toby asked a Japanese artist named Moa to redraw this title card with a new, localized Japanese name that roughly translates as "The Killer Robot's Kitchen of Sparkles".

On the Fly



DON'T 'COUNT'
ON YOUR VICTORY...

でも "ハエある"
ゆうしょうは そう
かんたんに かちとれない

Reader Challenge #7: Come up with a different English pun that could fit this fly-counting game show scene!

Mettaton challenges the player to count the number of flies in a jar, then says:

> *DON'T 'COUNT' ON YOUR VICTORY...*

This pun on the English word "count" is lost in a literal translation, so the translator adjusted it slightly:

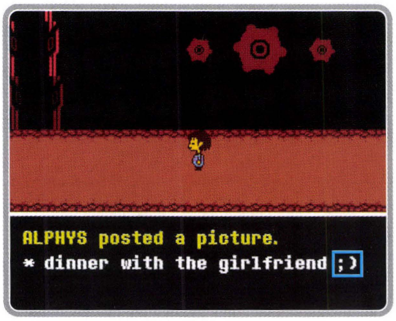
> *But a* "hae aru" *victory won't be so easy to achieve.*

The joke here is that *hae aru* usually means "glorious" or "honorable", but *hae* by itself can mean "fly" or "flies". Additionally, *hae aru* can be interpreted as a way of saying "there are flies". The result is a Japanese pun that uses completely different words to fit the scene seamlessly.

Funny Faces

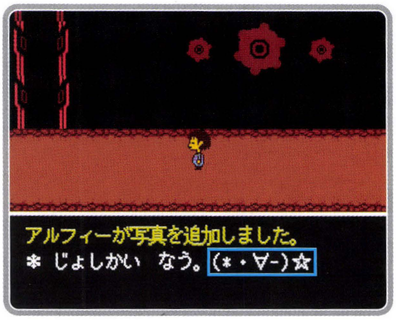
Dr. Alphys regularly posts on the Undernet, the Underground's version of the Internet. As such, she often includes smilies, emoticons, and Internet slang in her social media messages.

As we've already seen, different cultures use different emoticons and Internet slang, so many of Alphys' Undernet emoticons transformed during *Undertale*'s localization process. Some examples include:



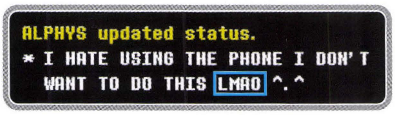
ALPHYS posted a picture.
* dinner with the girlfriend ;)

English: a sideways winking face



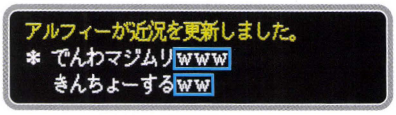
アルフィーが写真を追加しました。
＊ じょしかい なう。(＊・∀-)☆

Japanese: a winking face emitting a sparkle



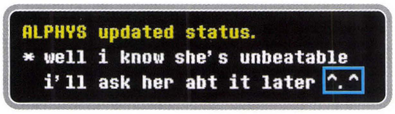
ALPHYS updated status.
* I HATE USING THE PHONE I DON'T
WANT TO DO THIS LMAO ^.^

English: "LMAO" is short for "laughing my ass off"



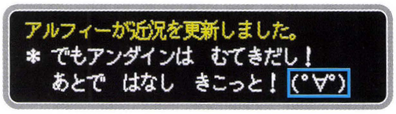
アルフィーが近況を更新しました。
＊ でんわマジムリwww
きんちょーするww

Japanese: "w" means *warai* ("laugh")



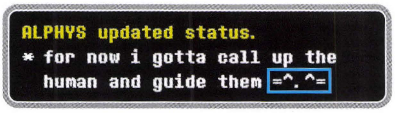
ALPHYS updated status.
* well i know she's unbeatable
i'll ask her abt it later ^.^

English: a happy or peppy smile



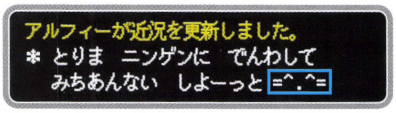
アルフィーが近況を更新しました。
＊ でもアンダインは むてきだし！
あとで はなし きこっと！(°∀°)

Japanese: a "goofing around" face



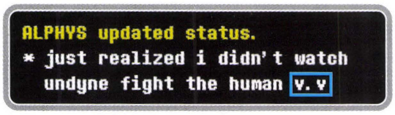
ALPHYS updated status.
* for now i gotta call up the
human and guide them =^.^=

English: a happy cat face



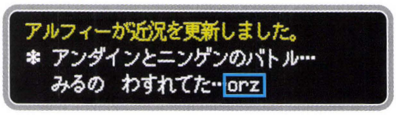
アルフィーが近況を更新しました。
＊ とりま ニンゲンに でんわして
みちあんない しよーっと=^.^=

Japanese: same as English



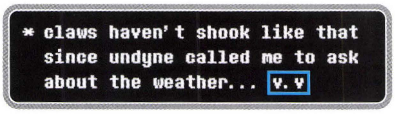
ALPHYS updated status.
* just realized i didn't watch
undyne fight the human v.v

English: a face showing dismay or sadness



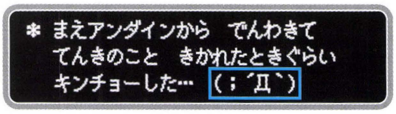
アルフィーが近況を更新しました。
＊ アンダインとニンゲンのバトル…
みるの わすれてた…orz

Japanese: a person on their hands and knees showing regret or despair



* claws haven't shook like that
since undyne called me to ask
about the weather... v.v

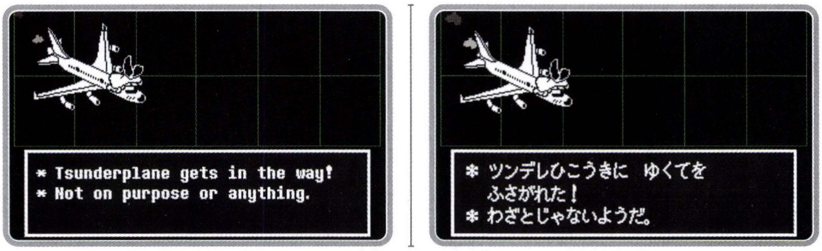
English: a face showing dismay or sadness



＊ まえアンダインから でんわきて
てんきのこと きかれたときぐらい
キンチョーした… (；´Д`)

Japanese: a face showing worry or anxiety

Polarizing Vocabulary

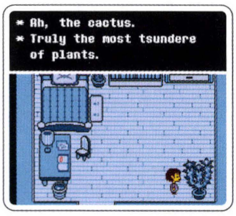

* Tsunderplane gets in the way!
* Not on purpose or anything.

＊ ツンデレひこうきに　ゆくてを
ふさがれた！
＊ わざとじゃないようだ。

Tsundere characters stereotypically say things like "it's not like I like you or anything, dummy"

Undertale's English script sometimes uses the Japanese word *tsundere*. In broad terms, *tsundere* – roughly pronounced "tsoon deh reh" – describes the trait of having an unfriendly attitude on the outside that gives way to an affectionate inner attitude over time.

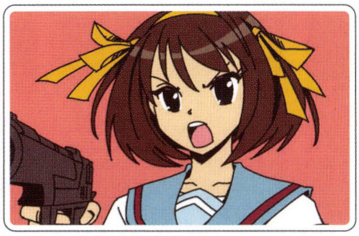
Tsundere is a common word in Japanese entertainment, but is notoriously troublesome to translate into English because it has no solid equivalent. For this reason, English-speaking fans of Japanese entertainment – such as Toby – tend to leave the word untranslated. Basically, *tsundere* is in the process of becoming a loan word in English like "karate" and "karaoke", but it hasn't yet reached mainstream recognition. As such, the word *tsundere* might confuse some English-speaking players, but it poses little problem for Japanese players.

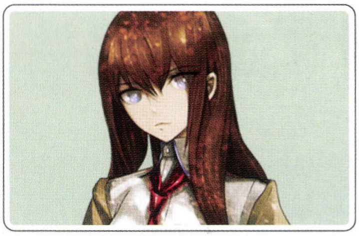

* Ah, the cactus.
* Truly the most tsundere
of plants.

Toby also included jokes about how the cactus is a *tsundere* plant because of its sharp exterior needles

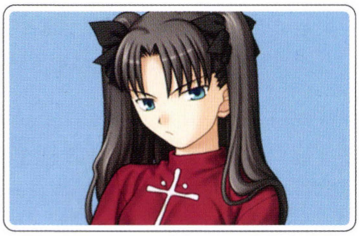
Tsundere Up Close

In Japanese entertainment, *tsundere* characters seem cold, indifferent, or harsh on the outside, but have an unseen, affectionate side that comes out over time when around certain people. Famous *tsundere* characters include:


Haruhi Suzumiya
(*Haruhi Suzumiya* series)

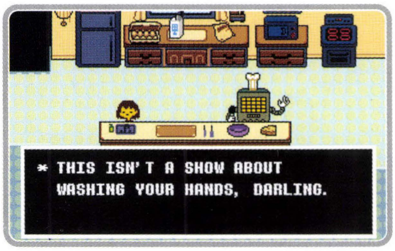

Kurisu Makise
(*Steins;Gate* series)

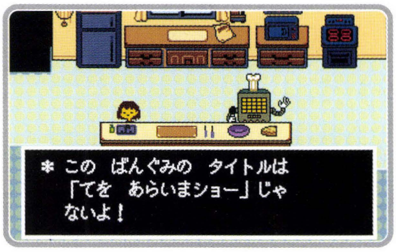
Princess Ruto
(*The Legend of Zelda* series)


Rin Tohsaka
(*Fate* series)

Unhelping Hands

This localization change points to a level of cultural knowledge that's beyond the reach of inexperienced translators and machine translation systems


* THIS ISN'T A SHOW ABOUT WASHING YOUR HANDS, DARLING.


＊ この ばんぐみの タイトルは
「てを あらいまショー」じゃ
ないよ！

During Mettaton's cooking show, the player is asked to find ingredients. If the player checks the sink, Mettaton will remark:

> *THIS ISN'T A SHOW ABOUT WASHING YOUR HANDS, DARLING.*

This relatively straightforward line received a boost of creativity in Japanese:

> *This show's title isn't* "Te o AraimaSHOW"*!*

ココ1
当てまSHOW!!

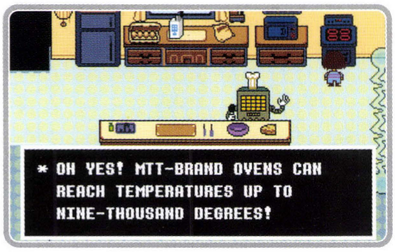
Replacing the Japanese verb fragment *shō* with the English word "SHOW" is very common on Japanese TV

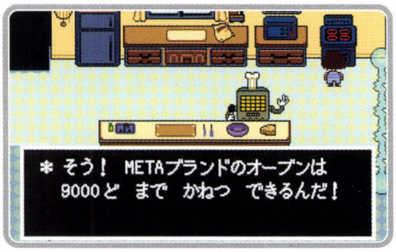
Normally, this would be written in Japanese as *te o araimashō*, which means "let's wash our hands". But in Japanese entertainment, titles that end in *shō* are sometimes replaced with the English word "show". This wordplay adds an extra layer of flair to the title in question, so this practice is particularly common with flashy entertainment. And, of course, Mettaton is all about being flashy.

In short, this Japanese line adds an extra level of natural, customary humor that isn't present in the original English text. In doing so, it arguably improves upon the original text.

Meme Temperature

Sometimes, things that seem like references aren't references at all – it's like "seeing" faces in clouds and carpet patterns


* OH YES! MTT-BRAND OVENS CAN REACH TEMPERATURES UP TO NINE-THOUSAND DEGREES!

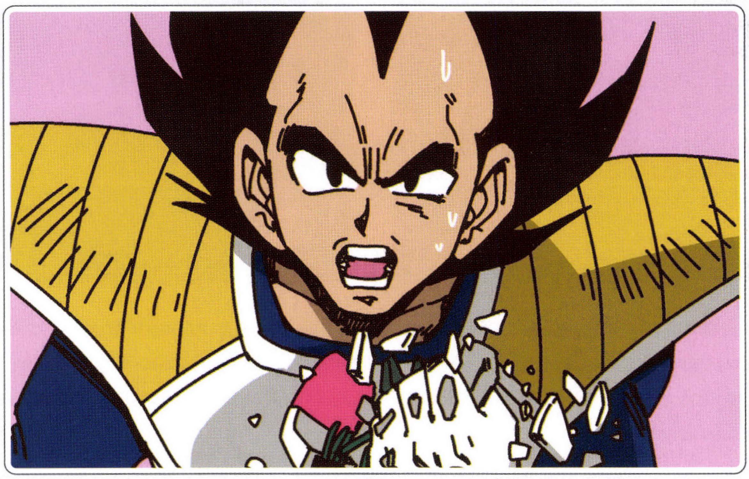

＊ そう！ METAブランドのオーブンは
9000ど まで かねつ できるんだ！

During the robot cooking show, Mettaton offers details about the oven:

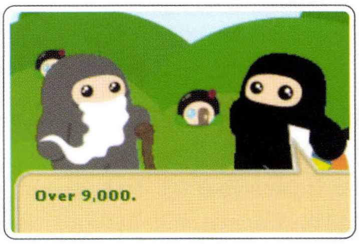
> *OH YES! MTT-BRAND OVENS CAN REACH TEMPERATURES UP TO NINE-THOUSAND DEGREES!*

Toby confirmed with the localization team that this reference to the number 9000 *isn't* a reference to the famous "it's over 9000!" Internet joke. He even included a note in the translation spreadsheet that said "Don't localize this as an over 9000 meme. Wait, that doesn't exist in Japan, does it...?". With this information in mind, the translator gave Mettaton's line a simple, straightforward translation into Japanese.

"It's Over 9000!" Explained

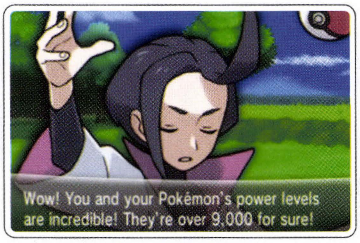


In a 1997 English dub of a *Dragon Ball Z* episode, a villain angrily shouts, "It's over 9000!" after checking his opponent's power level. In 2006, the humorous delivery of this English line transformed the quote into an online meme. The quote "It's over 9000!" could suddenly be found in countless articles, videos, message boards, and chat rooms. Over time, the quote also began to appear in mainstream English-language entertainment. It also began to appear in video games, including:



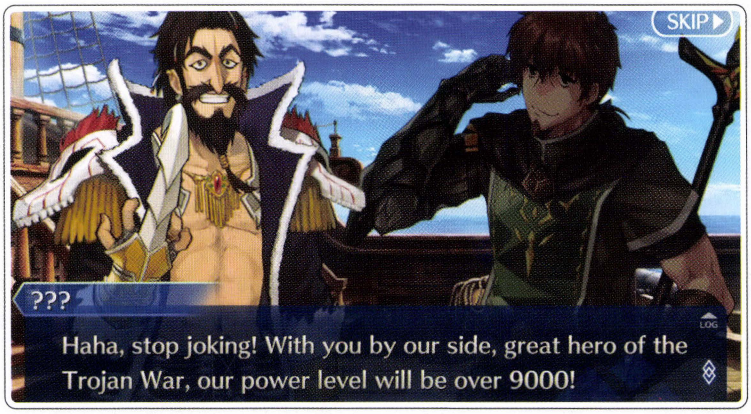
Over 9,000.

Ninjatown (2008)



Wow! You and your Pokémon's power levels are incredible! They're over 9,000 for sure!

Pokémon X/Y (2013)

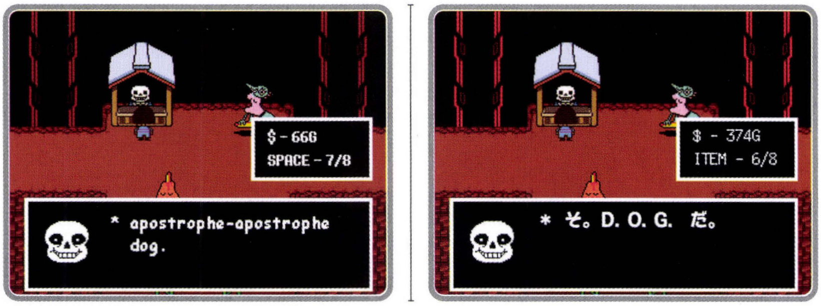


???

Haha, stop joking! With you by our side, great hero of the Trojan War, our power level will be over 9000!

Fate/Grand Order (2017)

Frankly Speaking


$ - 666
SPACE - 7/8
* apostrophe-apostrophe dog.

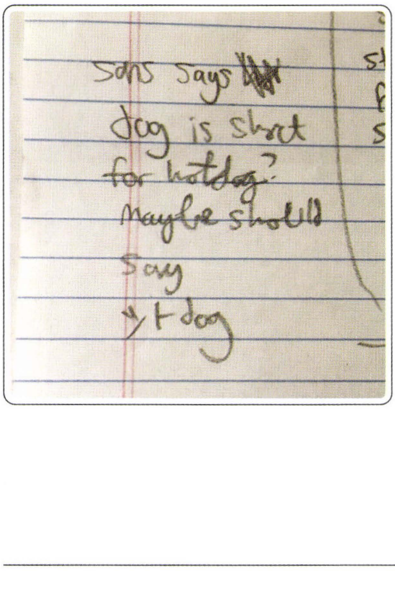
$ - 374G
ITEM - 6/8
* そ。D. O. G. だ。

Should've replaced the hot dogs with jelly doughnuts

Sans runs a hot dog stand in Hotland. If the player buys enough hot dogs, Sans invents new replacements for the word "hot dog". Because these silly name variations play with English punctuation and spelling, the translator tweaked them to work smoothly in Japanese:

Original English Joke	Approximate Japanese Localization
here's your 'dog. yeah, 'dog. apostrophe-dog. it's short for hot-dog.	here's your dog. that's right, "dog". it's my abbreviation for "hot dog".
another h'dog? here you go...	another hodog? you got it.
cool. here's that ''dog. apostrophe-apostrophe dog. it's short for apostrophe-dog.	want another D.O.G.? you got it. that's right. D.O.G. they're initials. they stand for "dog".

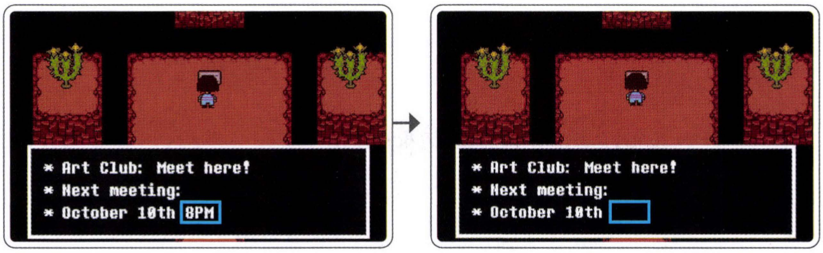
During the game's localization process, Toby often wrote notes to himself to later share with the localization team. In one such note, Toby came up with an idea for a comical "hot dog" abbreviation in Japanese: ットｄｏｇ (*tto dog*). Essentially, the "ho" part of "hot dog" would be dropped, and the word "dog" would be left in English.


Sans says [illegible]
dog is short
for hotdog?
Maybe should
say
ットdog

Toby's private notes included a handful of localization ideas he had considered but never shared with anyone

The idea behind Toby's new "hot dog" word was quite clever – the consonant extending character ッ almost never appears at the beginning of a Japanese word, and the decision to keep "dog" in English makes the Japanese abbreviation even sillier. Although he never pitched this suggestion to the localization team, it's another clear sign that Toby was actively involved in the localization process of his own game.

Version Juggling


* Art Club: Meet here!
* Next meeting:
* October 10th 8PM

* Art Club: Meet here!
* Next meeting:
* October 10th

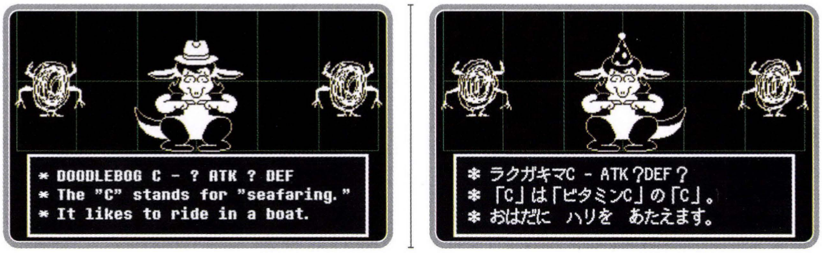
Different versions of *Undertale* have slightly different text than other versions – sometimes the differences are as tiny as this

As we've seen, not every version of *Undertale* is the same – for example, the PlayStation 4 version has content not found in the Nintendo Switch version, and vice-versa. These differences range in size, from secret rooms with new content to minor text changes that rely on alternate programming.

The fact that there are so many different versions of *Undertale* means that there are multiple English scripts that need to be managed, organized, and actively maintained. This holds true on the Japanese side of things too, meaning that Toby and 8-4 currently have to keep track of ten or so versions of the game. Understandably, this is a level of support not offered by most generic translation companies.

What's more, each time Toby adds new content or fixes a bug, all of these separate versions need to be updated, which can lead to even more versions to keep track of. All of this illustrates how game localization can be an ongoing process rather than a one-and-done affair.

Fun with Letters


* DOODLEBOG C – ? ATK ? DEF
* The "C" stands for "seafaring."
* It likes to ride in a boat.

＊ ラクガキマC – ATK ?DEF ?
＊ 「C」は「ビタミンC」の「C」。
＊ おはだに ハリを あたえます。

This secret enemy creates two new enemies named Doodlebog. Because there are three enemies total, the second Doodlebog is automatically (and unintentionally) called Doodlebog C

A secret battle features an artist and two "Doodlebog" enemies. In his translation notes, Toby explained that the second Doodlebog is automatically named "Doodlebog C" instead of "Doodlebog B" due to a programming bug. He liked this bug enough to give Doodlebog C its own pun-based description:

> *The "C" stands for "seafaring." It likes to ride in a boat.*

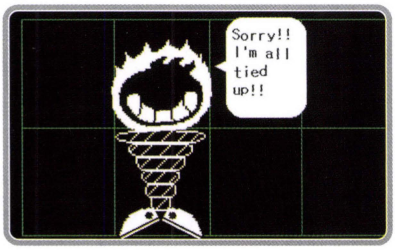
This wordplay would be lost in a literal translation, so the description became:

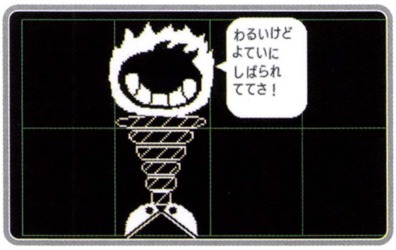
> *The "C" stands for "Vitamin C". It helps your skin look more supple.*

This change was actually Toby's idea – he understood that the pun would be lost in translation and prepared this suggestion ahead of time.

Tying it Together

Incidentally, Pyropes use the assertive, masculine pronoun *ore* in Japanese





Flaming rope monsters known as "Pyropes" appear in Hotland. During battle, the player can invite each Pyrope to "hang out". In the English script, the Pyrope will respond with:

> *Sorry!! I'm all tied up!!*

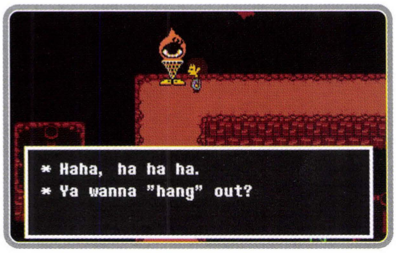
Toby understood that these rope-themed English puns would be lost in a literal translation, so he left a note in the translation spreadsheet:

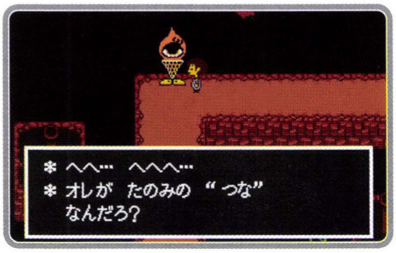
> *TIED UP??? GET IT??? ITS A JOKE BECAUSE HE'S A ROPE!!!*
> *btw since all this command does is trigger a pun, feel free to change it to anything you like*

To make these rope puns work in Japanese, the translator adjusted the lines slightly:

- "Hang out" became *burabura suru* ("to loiter/idle about; to dangle/hang down")
- "Tied up" became *yotei ni shibararete* ("to be bound/tied up by one's schedule")

These two screenshots are actually mock-ups I had to make, as a game bug appears to make this text inaccessible under normal circumstances


＊ Haha, ha ha ha.
＊ Ya wanna "hang" out?

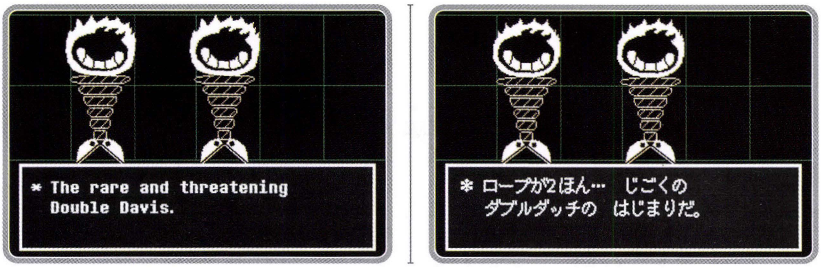

＊ へへ… へへへ…
＊ オレが たのみの “つな”
なんだろ?

A similar rope pun appears outside of battle, in a block of text that appears to be unused due to a programming issue. In English, a Pyrope character is supposed to say:

> *Haha, ha ha ha. Ya wanna "hang" out?*

Although this line seems to be inaccessible through normal play, the translator localized it into Japanese for completeness' sake. In this case, the translator replaced the phrase "hang out" with *tanomi no tsuna*, which literally means "a rope of reliance", but functionally means "a mainstay" or "something you can depend on". Thus the final Japanese line drops the invitation and instead roughly says "Hehe... Hehehe... I'm a real reliable 'lifeline', y'know?".

A Frayed Knot



* The rare and threatening
Double Davis.

＊ ロープが2ほん… じごくの
ダブルダッチの はじまりだ。

My theory is that the "Double Davis" here is somehow related to the "Double Davy" knot, but who knows anymore

In some cases, two Pyrope monsters will appear in battle at the same time. When this happens, the battle begins with the English message:

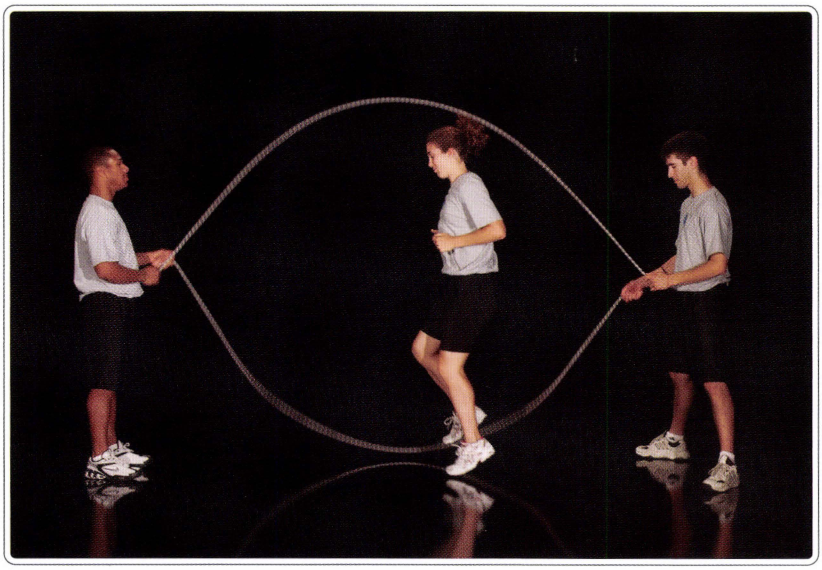
> *The rare and threatening Double Davis.*

From the player's perspective, this line appears to be a reference to something, but that "something" is never made clear. Fans have shared multiple theories over the years, but the truth remains a mystery. During this book's production, Toby privately stated that it was something he probably just made up at the time.

Unfortunately, Toby didn't provide any extra information about this line during the localization process, so the translator was left as puzzled as fans are. So, without any clear information to work from, the translator interpreted "Double Davis" as a potential reference to the "Double Dutch" jump-rope game that children play, just with added danger. The Japanese line thus became:

> *Two ropes... So begins a hellish game of Double Dutch.*

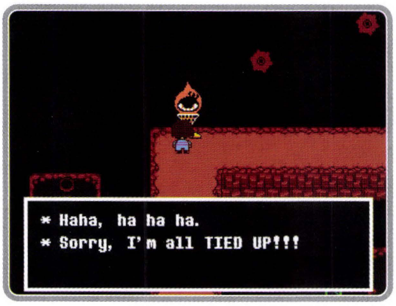
As a result of this localization decision, the mysterious, indecipherable English line was given a clear, understandable meaning in Japanese.



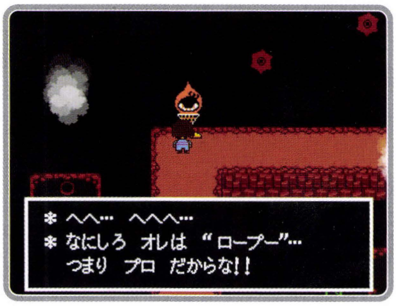
The Double Dutch jump rope game involves two jump ropes that turn in opposite directions at the same time

Backwards Talk

On a related but different note, Toby mentioned that "spicey" is purposely misspelled everywhere in the game, so the Japanese script uses slight misspellings too



* Haha, ha ha ha.
* Sorry, I'm all TIED UP!!!



＊ ヘヘ… ヘヘヘ…
＊ なにしろ オレは "ロープー"…
つまり プロ だからな!!

The possibly unused Pyrope dialogue includes two more lines of text:

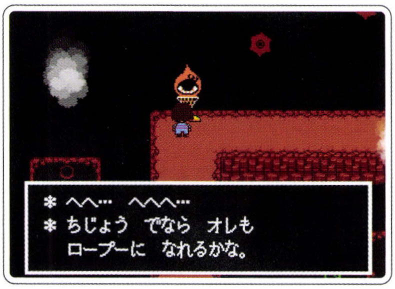
> *Haha, ha ha ha. Sorry, I'm all TIED UP!!!*
> *Psyche! Owned! No one wants to be MY friend!!!*

In Japanese, this became:

> *Hehe... Hehehe... After all, I am a* rōpū *– a* puro *in other words!*
> *Yeah, right! Just kidding! I'm actually just an ordinary* tōshiro*!*

To retain the rope pun in this dialogue, the translator used a form of Japanese wordplay referred to as *gyōkai yōgo* ("[entertainment] industry lingo") to make a pun on the words *rōpu* ("rope") and *puro* ("pro; professional"). The translator again used *gyōkai yōgo* to change *shirōto* ("amateur") into the nonsensical word *tōshiro* in the following line.

Because the same Pyrope character *does* properly appear at the end of the game with even more rope puns, it made sense for the translator to localize this inaccessible line too. By not skipping it, the translator ensured that Japanese players can appreciate this character's internal consistency if the original programming issues ever get fixed someday.



＊ ヘヘ… ヘヘヘ…
＊ ちじょう でなら オレも
ロープーに なれるかな。

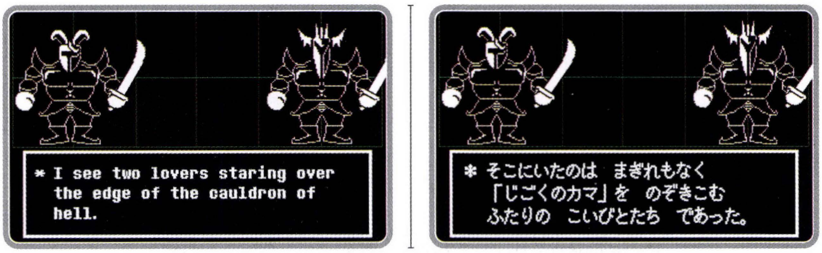
Insert your own fire pun here

Overview of Japanese *gyōkai yōgo*

In simple terms, Japanese *gyōkai yōgo*, sometimes referred to as *zūjago*, is similar to English "Pig Latin" – you basically shuffle and move the characters in a word to create a new, funny-sounding "secret code word".

In basic *gyōkai yōgo*, the final character in a word is moved to the front, and certain vowels are elongated. For example, トマト (*tomato*) might become トートマ (*tōtoma*), while スシ (*sushi*) might become シースー (*shīsū*).

Going Bananas


* I see two lovers staring over the edge of the cauldron of hell.

＊ そこにいたのは　まぎれもなく
「じごくのカマ」を　のぞきこむ
ふたりの　こいびとたち　であった。

Toby wasn't picky about this Japanese text being an exact quote from *Kitchen*

Two royal guards in Hotland block the way forward. Using patience and the proper choices, the player can convince the guards to reveal their hidden feelings for each other. During this process, using the "Check" command on the guards reveals two new descriptions:

> *I see two lovers staring over the edge of the cauldron of hell.*
>
> *Do they both wish for death? That means their love will end in hell. I couldn't stop laughing.*

Toby noted that these are indirect, inaccurate quotes from the English translation of *Kitchen*, a famous novel by Japanese author Banana Yoshimoto. The exact English quote from *Kitchen* is:

> *Although I had been earnestly daydreaming until then, I suddenly started to laugh. "I see two lovers looking over the edge of the cauldron of hell. Are they contemplating a double suicide? This means their love will end in hell." I couldn't stop laughing.*

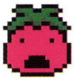
BANANA YOSHIMOTO
KITCHEN
The International Bestseller

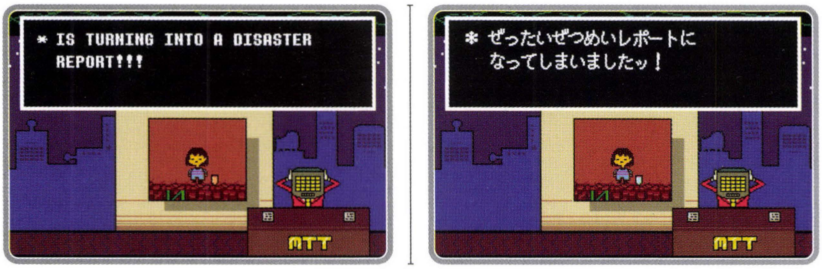
I didn't know we could put our nickname for our first name on stuff, I guess that makes me Tomato Mandelin!

Under normal circumstances, a professional translator would've immediately looked for the equivalent lines from the Japanese version of *Kitchen*. However, Toby specifically noted that he considered this text an "in-joke between friends" and that "since it's just a joke, you don't have to find the original". He further emphasized this attitude elsewhere in the spreadsheet by saying "Another Banana Yoshimoto reference. Again, I don't care that much".

Undertale's translator honored Toby's unusual wish and translated the guards' indirect English quotes back into Japanese as-is. This resulted in Japanese text that is recognizable as a *Kitchen* reference, but with noticeably different wording.

Normally, skilled translators will go out of their way to retain jokes and references, as it's assumed that the original author considered them important enough to use. As such, it's rare to encounter a situation like this, in which the author is actually so *unattached* to a reference that the translators are asked to skip it! Toby truly is the king of crazy exceptions.





* IS TURNING INTO A DISASTER REPORT!!!

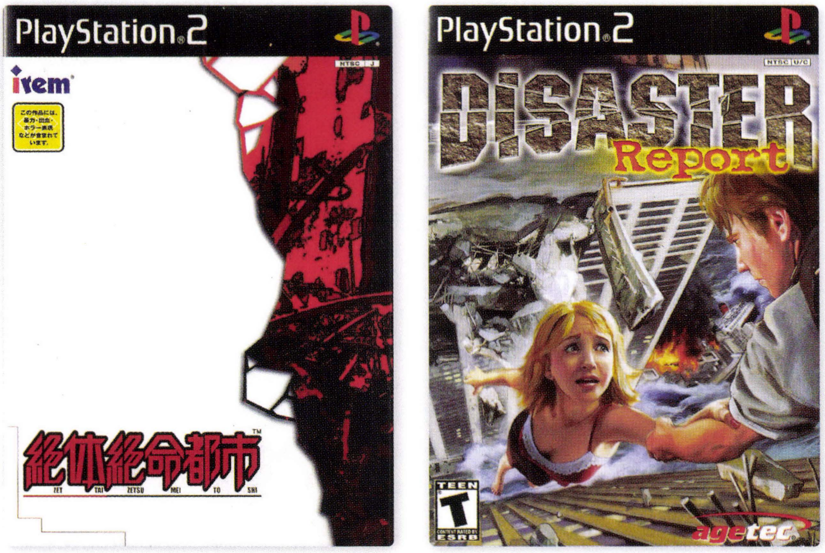
* ぜったいぜつめいレポートに
なってしまいましたッ！

As we've seen several times before, it's unclear if this localized reference is as recognizable in Japanese as it is in English

Mettaton forces the main character to participate in a live news broadcast. If the player chooses to report on a nearby a glass of water, Mettaton will shout:

> *WAIT A SECOND. THAT'S NOT A GLASS OF WATER!!!*
> *THAT'S... A BOMB!!! OH NO!!! THIS NEWS REPORT...*
> *IS TURNING INTO A DISASTER REPORT!!!*

Toby noted that this line includes a reference to *Disaster Report*, a PlayStation 2 game from 2003. This led to an unexpected issue, though – *Disaster Report* originally went by a very different name in Japan: *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* ("City of Certain Doom").



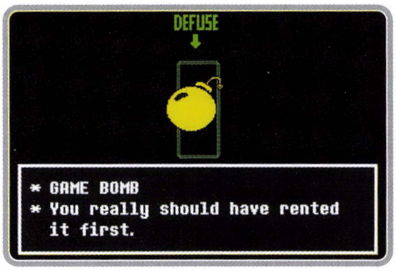
Disaster Report went by a different name in Japan – even the game's box was quite different

To keep Toby's *Disaster Report* reference intact, the translator rephrased Mettaton's line:

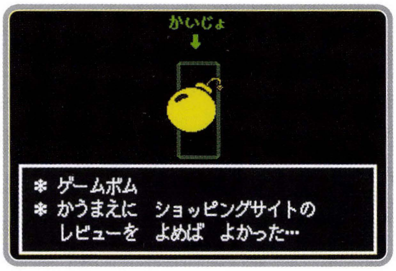
> *WAIT... THAT'S NOT A GLASS OF WATER! IT'S A BOMB!*
> *OH, NO! WHAT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A NEWS REPORT...*
> *HAS BECOME A REPORT OF CERTAIN DOOM!*

In the original English script, Toby's game reference is unobtrusive enough to sound like ordinary text to players unfamiliar with *Disaster Report*. The translator recognized this fact and phrased the Japanese line to work similarly.

Explosive Prohibition



* GAME BOMB
* You really should have rented
it first.



＊ ゲームボム
＊ かうまえに ショッピングサイトの
レビューを よめば よかった…

It's funny how we can say "that game is the bomb!" as a good thing but then also say "that game bombed!" as a bad thing

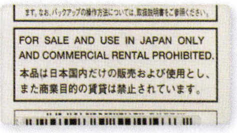
If the player reports on a nearby video game, the video game turns out to be a bomb too. In the English script, the game-bomb's description is:

> *GAME BOMB*
> *You really should have rented it first.*

Although common in many Western countries for decades, game rentals have generally been prohibited in Japan by law since 1984. With this in mind, the translator rephrased the game's Japanese description to say:

> *GAME BOMB*
> *You really should've read the shopping site reviews first.*

As minor as it is, this localization choice points to a level of cultural knowledge that goes beyond what an inexperienced translator or a machine can currently provide.

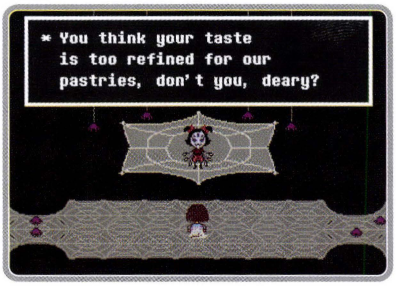


ます。なお、バックアップの操作方法については、取扱説明書をご参照ください。

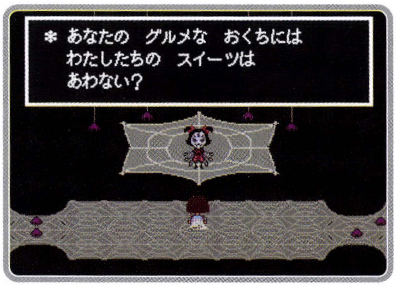
FOR SALE AND USE IN JAPAN ONLY
AND COMMERCIAL RENTAL PROHIBITED.
本品は日本国内だけの販売および使用とし、
また商業目的の賃貸は禁止されています。

Game rentals have been prohibited by Japanese law since the 1980s, although there have been attempts to legitimize the market from time to time

Muffet Speaks



* You think your taste
is too refined for our
pastries, don't you, deary?



＊ あなたの グルメな おくちには
わたしたちの スイーツは
あわない?

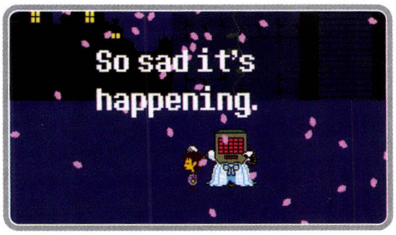
If you're curious, the classic *Little Miss Muffet* nursery rhyme isn't widely known in Japan, but it has received multiple translations into Japanese over the years

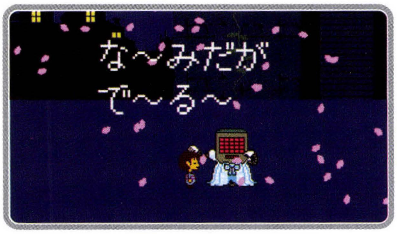
A spider monster named Muffet appears in Hotland. In English, Muffet tends to call the main character "dearie", but not in Japanese. This is because the sentiment is already conveyed by her cordial, feminine speech pattern in Japanese – including the use of the polite, feminine pronoun *watashi*.

In English, Muffet uses tildes (the squiggly ~ mark) at the end of words to denote a cute, upbeat tone of voice. This use of tildes is still uncommon in English, which lends Muffet a distinctive vibe. Tilde-like characters are extremely common in Japanese entertainment, so Muffet retains her squiggles in the Japanese script. Basically, this tilde use is a good example of how Toby blended certain Japanese language quirks into *Undertale*'s original English script.

Opera Floozy

In his notes, Toby said "this whole sequence is a reference to the opera in FF6 but it's just a parody so I don't care about having the tone being identical or being overly referential"





Mettaton forces the main character to participate in an opera scene that includes a song with lyrics. But as we've already seen, songs don't work well when translated literally. For this reason, the translator revised the lyrics to be singable in Japanese while remaining as faithful to the original lyrics as possible:

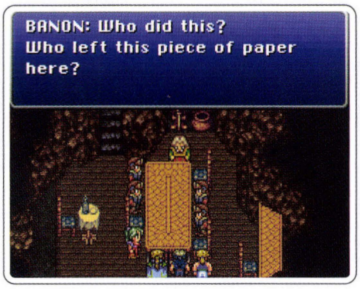
English Lyrics	Japanese Lyrics	Japanese Meaning
Oh my love	*a~na~ta*	My dear
Please run away	*ni~ge~te~yo~*	run away
Monster King	*ōsama ni~*	The king is
Forbids your stay	*mi~tsu~ka~ru~*	going to find you
Humans must	*ningen wa~*	Humans are
Live far apart	*teki na no~*	our enemy, you see
Even if	*kanashi~i*	It's so sad
It breaks my heart	*ke~re~do~mo~*	but
They'll put you	*o~ri~ ni~*	you'll be put
In the dungeon	*i~re~ra~re~*	into a cell
It'll suck	*ki~tto~*	and surely
And then you'll die a lot	*bukko~ro~sa~re~ru~*	get totally killed
Really sad	*ko~re~ de~*	Now this is where
You're gonna die	*o~wa~ka~re~*	we say goodbye
Cry cry cry	*bai bai ba~i*	Bye bye bye
So sad it's happening.	*na~mida ga de~ru~*	My tears are coming out

After *Undertale*'s Japanese release, players praised these new lyrics for "feeling like they were written in Japanese to begin with" and for "sounding even better" than the original English lyrics. From such reactions, it's clear that the translator managed to mimic the "feel" of Toby's original writing, resulting in a seamless localization.

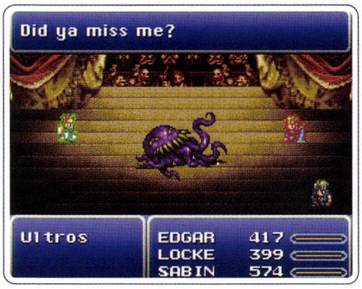
Inspiration Spotlight: *Final Fantasy VI*

LICENSED BY
Nintendo
FINAL FANTASY III
SQUARESOFT
SUPER NINTENDO

Super Famicom
ファイナルファンタジーVI
FINAL FANTASY VI
SQUARESOFT



BANON: Who did this?
Who left this piece of paper
here?



Did ya miss me?

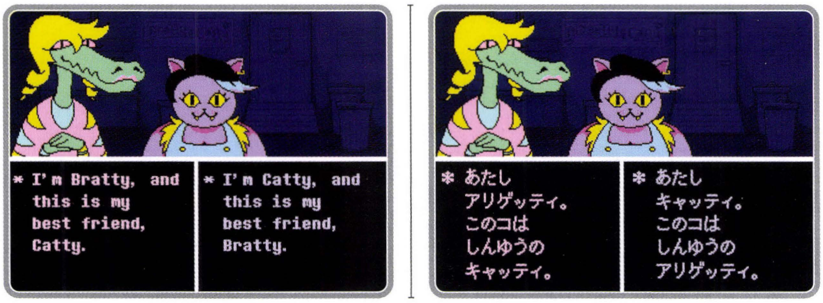
Ultros

EDGAR 417
LOCKE 399
SABIN 574

In 1994, Square released *Final Fantasy VI* for the Japanese Super Famicom and the North American Super NES. As another of Square's classic Japanese RPGs, *Final Fantasy VI* combined established game design with entertaining innovations and surprises. Like many of Square's games from the 1990s, *Final Fantasy VI* enjoyed great critical success and inspired a new generation of game designers.

Meeting Bratty and Catty

Bratty and Catty speak at the same time, which is so unusual that it required the localizers to jump through extra technical hoops to nail down



* I'm Bratty, and this is my best friend, Catty.

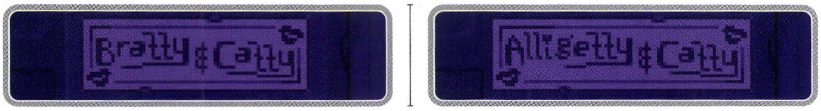
* I'm Catty, and this is my best friend, Bratty.

＊ あたし アリゲッティ。このコは しんゆうの キャッティ。

＊ あたし キャッティ。このコは しんゆうの アリゲッティ。

A cat monster named "Catty" and an alligator monster named "Bratty" run a shop in a back alley. Because the English word "bratty" isn't well known in Japan, Bratty was renamed "Alligetty" in Japanese. Early on, Toby was informed that ブラッティ (*buratti*, "Bratty") might also look confusingly similar to ブラッディ (*buraddi*, "bloody"), which *is* a well-known English word in Japan.

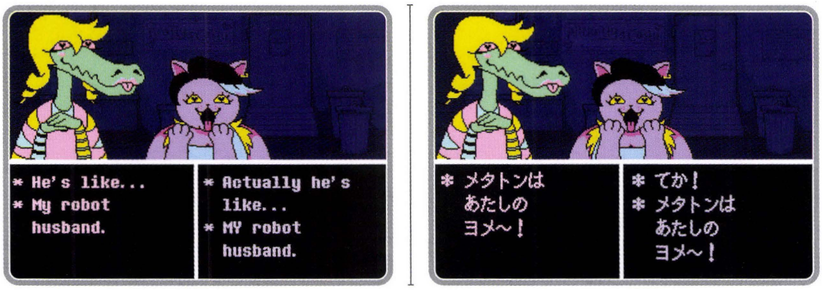
The English word "cat" is widely known in Japan, so Catty's name didn't need any updates



Bratty's name happens to appear on a faint background banner in one scene. To reflect her new name in Japanese, the localization team crafted a new banner that spells "Alligetty", then modified the game's core programming to display the proper banner based on the player's language settings.

Bratty and Catty Speak

Bratty and Catty generally use the feminine Japanese pronoun あたし (*atashi*) to refer to themselves



* He's like...
* My robot husband.

* Actually he's like...
* MY robot husband.

＊ メタトンは あたしの ヨメ～！

＊ てか！
＊ メタトンは あたしの ヨメ～！

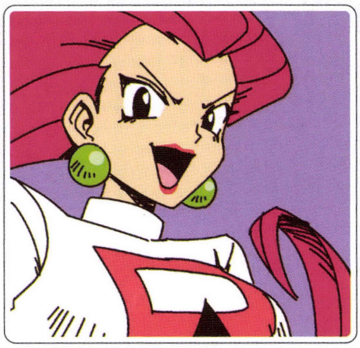
In English, Bratty and Catty use Valleyspeak, an American social dialect that's associated with teenage girls. The translator replicated this in Japanese by giving the characters a similar speech pattern associated with the Japanese *gyaru* subculture. Both characters use the feminine pronoun *atashi*.

Because Valleyspeak and "Gyaru-speak" speech share similar demographics, histories, and usages, it's very common to see one localized into the other

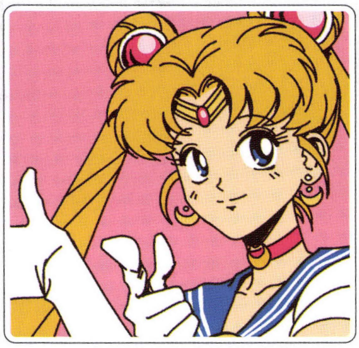
Bratty and Catty are unique in that both start speaking and stop speaking at the same time. Toby noted that some of these simultaneous lines might cause the game to "mess up" unless Bratty and Catty use an equal number of letters when speaking. Naturally, the translation process demolished this synchronization, so Bratty and Catty's lines required extra fine-tuning to display properly in Japanese.

Japanese Personal Pronouns: *atashi*

In modern Japanese, *atashi* is an informal, feminine personal pronoun. *Atashi* is less formal than *watashi,* and is far more common in everyday Japanese than *achishi.* Other fictional characters who use *atashi* include:

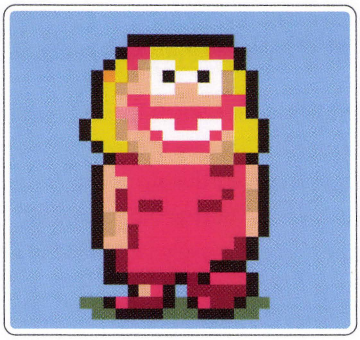


Musashi/Jessie
(*Pokémon* series)

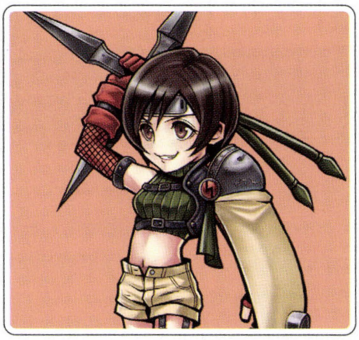


Sailor Moon
(*Sailor Moon* series)

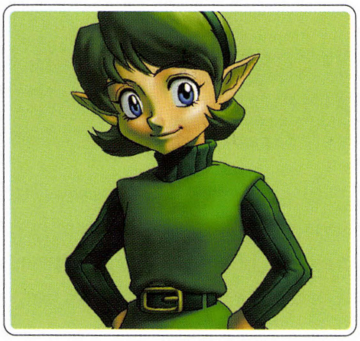
Wendy Koopa
(*Super Mario Bros.* series)



Lardna
(*MOTHER 2/EarthBound*)



Yuffie Kisaragi
(*Final Fantasy* series)

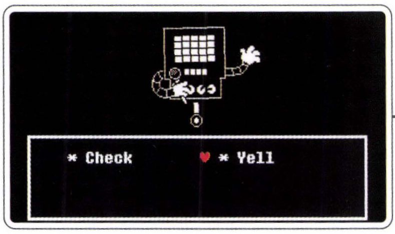


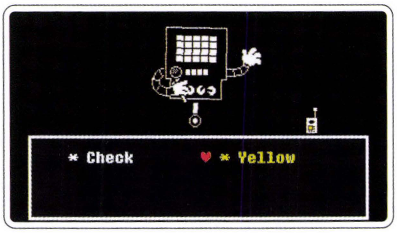
Saria
(*The Legend of Zelda* series)

Yellow Front

During another encounter with Mettaton, the unique battle option "Yell" doesn't seem to do anything. Eventually, though, a yellow button appears on the main character's cell phone. The useless "Yell" option then quietly becomes the "Yellow" option.

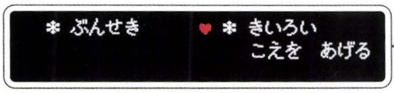
One of the toughest challenges in localization is handling important wordplay that must adhere to specific, scene-based restrictions

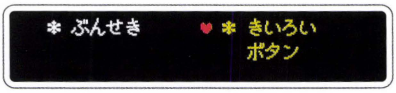




Because this scene plays with how "yell" and "yellow" are spelled in English, the wordplay would be lost a straightforward translation into Japanese. What's more, this scene *requires* the mention of a yellow button, so any new wordplay would need to revolve around "yellow" or "button" in some way.

Getting the "yell" and "yellow" joke to work in Japanese took creativity to figure out

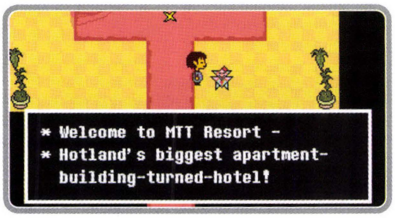




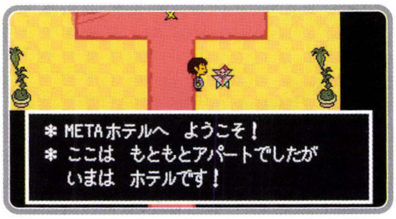
To preserve this scene's logic, the translator localized "Yell" as *ki iroi koe o ageru*, which literally means "to let out a yellow voice" but functionally means "to cry out in a shrill voice". The translator then localized "Yellow" as *ki iroi botan* ("yellow button"). So although it uses slightly different wording, the Japanese scene closely parallels the English script in tone and intent.

Getting Meta

As we've seen, it's not too rare for different languages to use different abbreviations for the same thing



* Welcome to MTT Resort -
* Hotland's biggest apartment-building-turned-hotel!



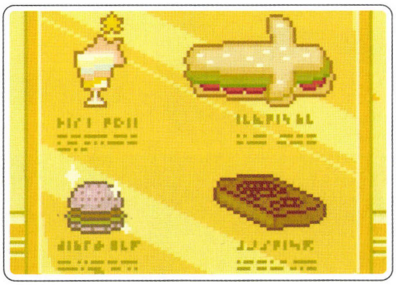
＊ METAホテルへ ようこそ！
＊ ここは もともとアパートでしたが いまは ホテルです！

Throughout the English version of *Undertale*, the name "Mettaton" is abbreviated as "MTT". The localizers were concerned that this abbreviation's meaning might be lost in translation, so the team used a different abbreviation in the Japanese script: "META". Some examples include:

- "MTT News" became "META News"
- "MTT-Brand" became "META-Brand"
- "MTT Resort" became "META Hotel"

This change from "MTT" to "META" wasn't applied everywhere, however – "MTT" still appears in several graphical assets in the Japanese version.

Not on the Menu

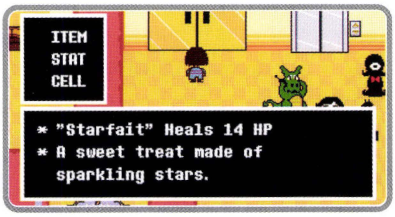


In the English version of *Undertale*, the Mettaton-themed restaurant sells four Mettaton-themed food items

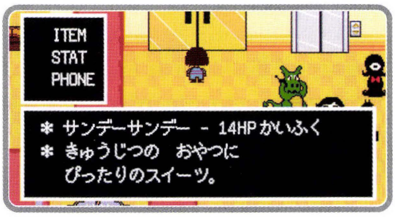
A Mettaton-themed restaurant inside the MTT Resort sells four different Mettaton-themed items:

- A hamburger called the "Glamburger"
- A hero/submarine sandwich called the "Legendary Hero"
- A steak shaped like Mettaton's face, called the "Face Steak"
- A parfait called the "Starfait"

These items are meant to represent how fabulous and popular Mettaton considers himself to be: a glamorous, legendary, heroic star with an incredible face.



* "Starfait" Heals 14 HP
* A sweet treat made of sparkling stars.



* サンデーサンデー - 14HPかいふく
* きゅうじつの おやつに
ぴったりのスイーツ。

I wonder if fans have made actual Starfaits and Sunday Sundaes – if so, it'd be cool to see if they differ at all

In Japanese, the Glamburger, Legendary Hero, and Face Steak items remain unchanged. However, the Starfait – which is short for "Star Parfait" – became the "Sunday Sundae" and received a new Japanese description:

English Text	Japanese Text (roughly translated)
A sweet treat made of sparkling stars.	The perfect sweet for a snack on your day off.

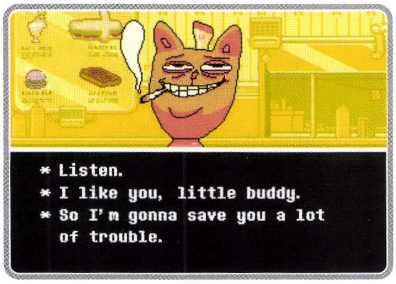
The Starfait received this new name and description early in *Undertale*'s localization, when Toby and the translation team were still getting accustomed to the project's workflow and with working with each other. During this time, Toby explained his vision for the Japanese script:

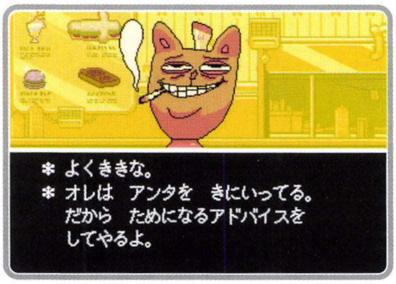
> *Undertale is full of weird things and jokes. If there's a funny line in the EN version that doesn't work in the JP version, it's obviously better to change it to something funny rather than try to make it faithful. I'd be glad to help with any of these changes if necessary.*

With this note in mind, the team played around with various item names in early versions of the Japanese script. Thus, at some point, the "Starfait" became the サンデーサンデー (*sandē sandē*, "Sunday Sundae") and remained that way. This "Sunday Sundae" change does have drawbacks, however: the new name and description are no longer Mettaton-themed or star-themed.

Burgerpants Speaks

Burgerpants tends to call the main character "little buddy" in English, and *anta* (a casual form of "you") in Japanese


* Listen.
* I like you, little buddy.
* So I'm gonna save you a lot
of trouble.

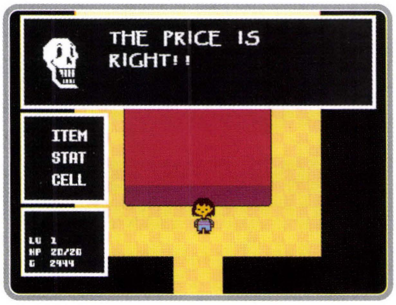

* よくききな。
* オレは　アンタを　きにいってる。
だから　ためになるアドバイスを
してやるよ。

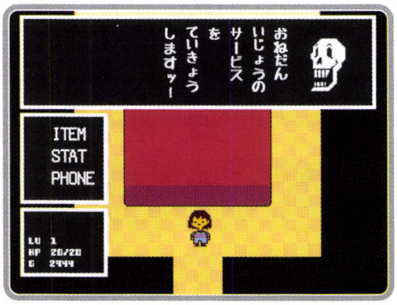
A character named Burgerpants works at the Mettaton-themed restaurant in Hotland. In English, Burgerpants speaks in a cheerful and polite manner when speaking as an employee, but quickly shifts to a variety of hyper-casual speech styles whenever he drops his professional persona.

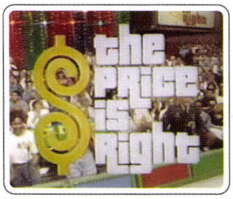
Burgerpants speaks in a similar way in Japanese too – he uses proper and polite speech when speaking as an employee, but switches to different casual speaking styles in other situations. Burgerpants never uses personal pronouns when speaking formally in Japanese, but he does use the informal, masculine pronoun *ore* during more casual moments.

Come on Down

The Price Is Right is a simple English idiom and the name of a popular TV game show


THE PRICE IS
RIGHT!!


おねだんいじょうのサービスをていきょうしますッ！



Story idea: only people who are ill can see this show, the TV screen is random static otherwise

Under certain conditions, Papyrus will describe the MTT Hotel with one short English phrase:

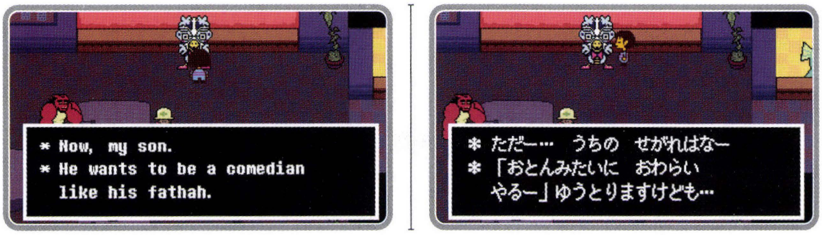
> *THE PRICE IS RIGHT!!*

Toby noted that this can be taken either as a reference to the classic American game show *The Price Is Right*, or just as a simple English idiom. Because the game show reference would be lost in a literal translation, the translator chose to follow the idiom option. Thus, the new Japanese line became:

> *Providing service worth more than its price!*

Variations of this phrase often appear in Japanese slogans and advertisements. So although this localization choice lacks a clear pop culture reference, it does keep the logic behind Papyrus' line intact.

Fatherly Humor



* Now, my son.
* He wants to be a comedian
like his fathah.

＊ ただー…　うちの　せがれはな～
＊「おとんみたいに　おわらい
やる～」ゆうとりますけども…

Both Snowdrake and his father speak with an Osaka accent in Japanese, which makes sense – like father, like son

Previously, a teenage comedian monster named Snowdrake appeared in the Snowdin area. It turns out that his is father is the in-house comedian at the MTT Hotel in Hotland.

In English, Snowdrake's father has an unusual accent – he uses the word "fathah" instead of "father", for example. Toby explained in his translation notes that this character "talks like a weird Jewish dad, in a stilted way". This unique speech pattern suggests that the father might not be from the Hotland region to begin with.

To retain this sense of "outsider-ness", the translator gave Snowdrake's father a thick Osaka accent. This makes perfect sense for two reasons: Osaka is the comedy capital of Japan, and Snowdrake already has an Osaka accent. The result: Snowdrake's father sounds like a Japanese comedian who has passed on some of his traits and ambitions to his son.

Japanese *Manzai* Comedy

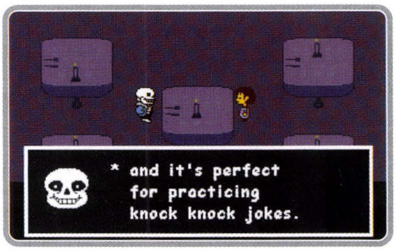
Manzai is a long-established form of Japanese stand-up comedy that traditionally features a team of two comedians. Much like the double-act comedy routines found in other countries, *manzai* usually involves one *bokeh* ("funny man") and one *tsukkomi* ("straight man") playing off of each other as ridiculous situations unfold.

Historically, *manzai* is approximately 1000 years old, but modern-day *manzai* emerged from Osaka in the early 1900s. From there, Osaka-style *manzai* spread to the rest of Japan via stage, radio, and other forms of entertainment.

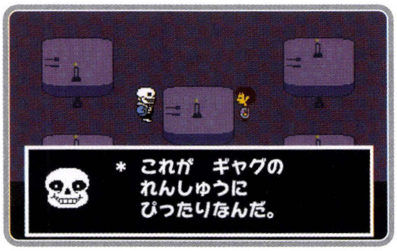
Today, *manzai* corporations play a major part in the Japanese entertainment industry by cultivating and introducing new talent. As such, many Japanese actors, singers, television hosts, and other celebrities begin their careers by making a name for themselves on the national *manzai* circuit.

Dishing Out Comedy

In his translation notes for this scene, Toby said, "I heard there are no knock knock jokes in JP. I can try to think of some alternate takes on this"



* and it's perfect
for practicing
knock knock jokes.



＊ これが ギャグの
れんしゅうに
ぴったりなんだ。

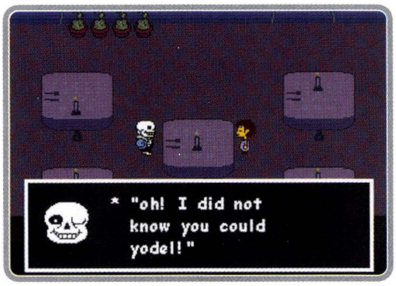
Sans reveals important background information during a story scene. At one point in the English script, he retells a knock-knock joke:

English Text	Japanese Text (roughly translated)
fortunately, deep in the forest... there's this HUGE locked door. and it's perfect for practicing knock knock jokes.	but deep in the forest is a huge locked door, perfect for practicing my comedy with.
so one day, i'm knocking 'em out, like usual. i knock on the door and say "knock knock." and suddenly, from the other side... i hear a woman's voice.	one day, i was practicing my latest jokes while pretending the door was the audience. suddenly, from behind the door, a woman's voice butted in with a sharp retort:
"who is there?"	"what are ya, an idiot or somethin'?!"
so, naturally, I respond: "dishes."	without skipping a beat, i replied: "if i'm such an idiot, why are you playing the straight-man during a solo comedy routine?!"
"dishes who?"	the voice replied: "well, if i'm such an idiot, why the heck are you, the funny-man, insulting the straight-man in a duo comedy routine?!"
"dishes a very bad joke."	then i said: "i'm not even doing a funny-man act to begin with!"
then she just howls with laughter.	then the woman started to laugh.

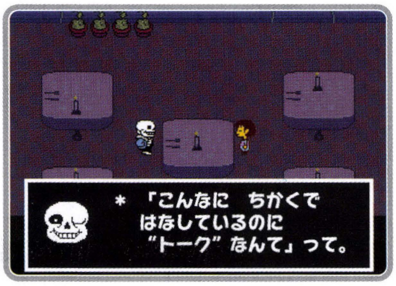
Because knock-knock jokes don't exist in Japan, and because the English joke in this scene plays with how "this is" and "dishes" are pronounced, the scene would've made little sense in a literal translation. To get around this problem, the translator replaced the knock-knock joke with a joke related to two common forms of Japanese comedy: solo acts and duo *manzai* acts.

Although this new Japanese text parallels the humor of the original text, it does carry one minor side effect: it makes some level of sense for a comedian to practice knock-knock jokes while standing in front of a giant door, but it makes less sense to practice generic comedy in the same situation.

Knockabout Solution



* "oh! I did not
know you could
yodel!"



* 「こんなに　ちかくで
はなしているのに
"トーク" なんて」って。

In my experience, pronunciation-based jokes are almost always too slippery to be translatable between languages

Sans continues to discuss his unusual experience at the giant door. This time, the person behind the door makes a knock-knock joke. Naturally, the translator had to rephrase this scene in Japanese too:

English Text	Japanese Text (roughly translated)
then, after a dozen of 'em, SHE knocks and says...	then, the woman says...
"knock knock!"	"can I tell a joke too?"
i say "whos there?"	"sure!" i say.
"old lady!"	"say, doesn't it seem strange?" she asks.
"old lady who?"	"what do you mean?" i reply.
"oh! I did not know you could yodel!"	"we're talking so close to each other, but we're so '*tōku*' away."

This dialogue contains two main points of interest. First, astute players will realize that the "old lady" in Sans' story is actually Toriel, although the two have yet to meet in person.

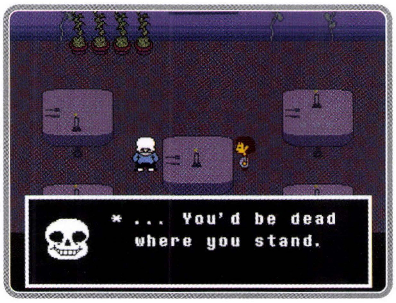
Second, and more importantly, Toriel's knock-knock joke plays with how the phrase "old lady who" sounds like the shout that yodelers make, "yodel-ay-ee-oo". But again, because knock-knock jokes don't exist in Japanese, and because this joke plays with English pronunciation, a literal translation of the scene would lose all meaning.

Yodeling is a traditional form of singing that originated in rural regions of Europe. It involves quickly switching back and forth between super-high and super-low notes

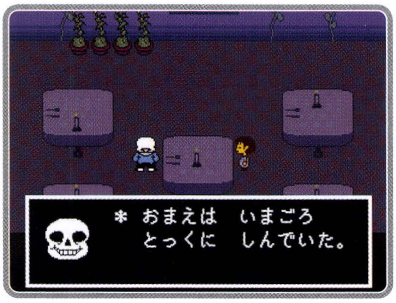
To get around these linguistic and cultural barriers, the translator replaced the English knock-knock joke with a pun on the Japanese word *tōku*, which can mean both "far away" and "talk". The result is a cheesy joke in Japanese that perfectly matches Toriel's character.

Sans Surprise

Imagine being longtime friends with the kindest, funniest person alive – like maybe Mr. Rogers from American TV – then suddenly hearing them say, "I'll kill you if I have to."



* ... You'd be dead
where you stand.



* おまえは　いまごろ
とっくに　しんでいた。

Throughout the story so far, Sans has been a friendly, joke-loving goofball. But suddenly, with a terrifying look on his face, he says in a completely different font and tone of voice:

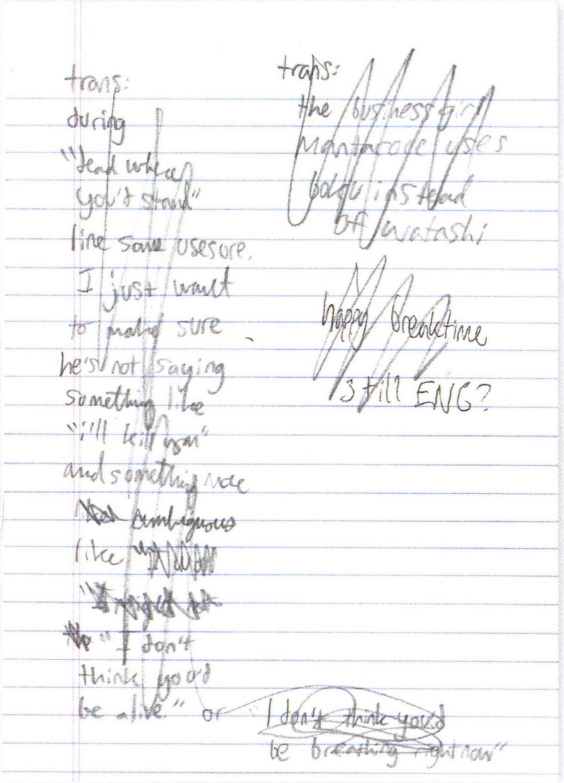
> *that promise i made to her... you know what would have happened if she hadn't said anything? ...buddy. You'd be dead where you stand.*

Toby intended this line to emotionally shock the player, as it's the first real time that Sans shows that he has a dark, frightening side. Naturally, Toby considers this scene – and this specific line – very important to the *Undertale* experience. As such, he was very particular about how this line was handled in translation. After a lot of trial-and-error, Toby and the translation team went with a straightforward approach:

> おまえは いまごろ とっくに しんでいた。
> [Literally: *"You'd be long dead by now."* or *"You'd already be dead by now."*]

The original English line leaves it unclear why the main character would be dead by now. It's left to the player's interpretation: would Sans have killed the main character himself, would he have captured the main character for the king to kill later, or possibly something else? This Japanese line achieves a similar vagueness through careful wording.

After the official translation's release, Japanese players indeed found this scene shocking, and the vagueness of the translated line left players with different interpretations. Given this, there's no doubt that Toby's persistence with this line led to a superior, more faithful translation in the end.



trans:
during
"dead where
you'd stand"
line sans uses ore.
I just want
to make sure
he's not saying
something like
"i'll kill you"
and something more
[illegible] ambiguous
like [illegible]
"[illegible]
~~the~~ "I don't
think you'd
be alive" or "~~I don't think you'd~~
~~be breathing right now~~"

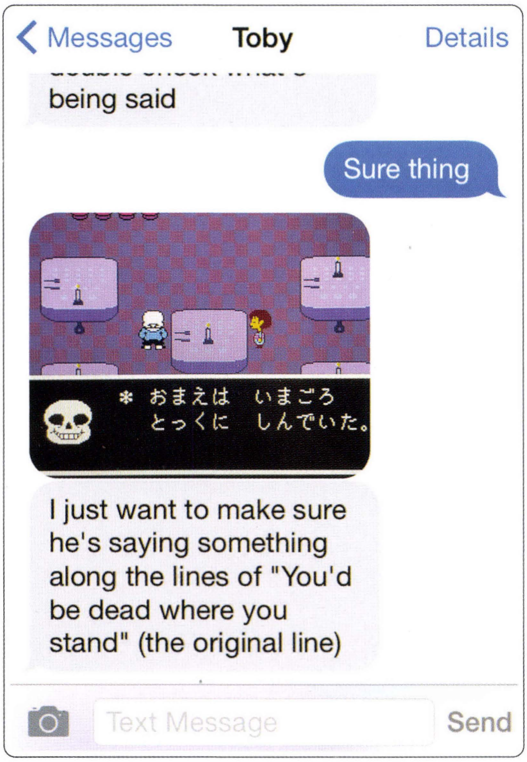
~~trans:
the business girl
Mantaroge uses
boku instead
of watashi~~

~~happy breaktime~~

still ENG?

From some of his personal notes-to-self, we can see that Toby cared a great deal about this Sans scene in particular

Toby actively consulted outside sources for second opinions about the nuances of localized lines



being said

Sure thing

＊ おまえは　いまごろ
とっくに　しんでいた。

I just want to make sure he's saying something along the lines of "You'd be dead where you stand" (the original line)

The Core

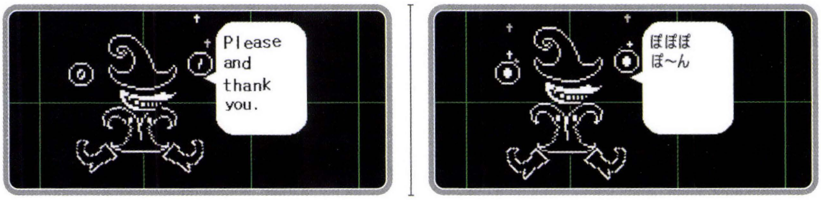
The Core

Relentless Human Threatens Vital Infrastructure

The main character now enters the Core, an advanced energy generation facility. Extreme temperatures and enhanced foes wait inside.

Works Like a Charm

Localizing magic spells into other languages sounds like a fictional Hogwarts class or something, but nope, it's a real thing



Please and thank you.

ぽぽぽ
ぽ〜ん

A monster named Madjick occasionally chants magic words during battle. Some of these magic words remained unchanged during the translation process, while others were localized to make more sense for Japanese players.

Abra Cadabra

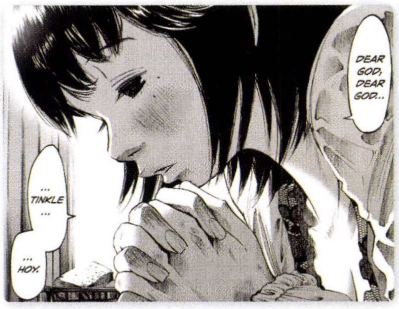
In English, "abra cadabra" is a customary, well-known magic word that can be used in just about any magic-related situation. Because "abra cadabra" is well known in Japan too, this magic word remained the same in *Undertale*'s Japanese script.

Alakazam

In English, "alakazam" is another standard, well-known magic word. This word is less known in Japan, however, so the localization team replaced "alakazam" with *chichinpui*, a magic-like Japanese phrase often said to children to soothe their pain after getting hurt.

Tinkle Tinkle Hoy

Another of Madjick's phrases, "tinkle tinkle hoy", *isn't* a commonly known magic word in English. In the translation spreadsheet, Toby noted that "tinkle tinkle hoy" is actually a reference to a magic phrase in the Japanese manga series, *Oyasumi Pun Pun*. Naturally, the localization team ensured that this reference remained intact in the Japanese script.


DEAR GOD, DEAR GOD...
... TINKLE ...
... HOY

Toby included the magic phrase "tinkle tinkle hoy" as a reference to the *Oyasumi Pun Pun* series

Hocus Pocus

"Hocus pocus" is one of *the* most classic magic phrases in English. Although it's less known in Japan, it does appear occasionally in Japanese entertainment. For this reason, "hocus pocus" remained as-is in the Japanese script.

Please and Thank You

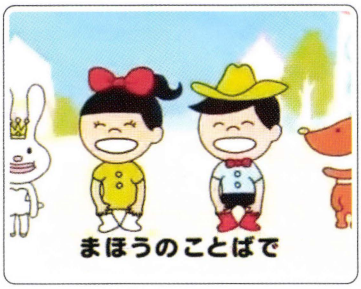
Children in English-speaking regions are taught that "please" and "thank you" are "magic words" that should be used when making a request or after receiving something. The joke here is that "please" and "thank you" are out of place in this situation – they aren't actual "magic words" that magicians chant.

Because "please" and "thank you" aren't traditionally called "magic words" in Japanese, the translator changed Madjick's "please and thank you" to *popopopo~n*. This mostly meaningless word is a reference to *Aisatsu no Mahō* ("Greetings Are Magic"), a magic-themed public service announcement that constantly aired on Japanese television in 2011.

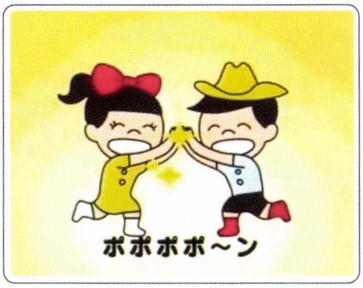
Aisatsu no Mahō on Japanese Television

In 2011, several regions of Japan were hit by devastating natural and manmade disasters. During this painful and turbulent time, many Japanese companies felt it would be inappropriate and tone-deaf to advertise their products on television between the constant news programs about the disasters. For this reason, ordinary commercials on television were often replaced with simple filler material.

One such "filler video" was *Aisatsu no Mahō* ("Greetings Are Magic"), a 2010 children's song and television public service announcement that aired with brain-searing regularity in 2011. *Aisatsu no Mahō* repeated on Japanese television so often that it became a widely shared cultural experience. The video grew so grating over time that it spawned hate memes, spooky urban legends, and elaborate conspiracy theories.



Aisatsu no Mahō teaches children to be polite and friendly by using various "magic words"

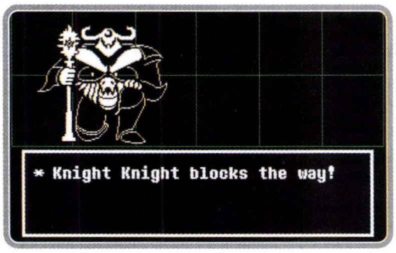


The made-up sound effect word *popopopo~n* became closely tied with magic through excessive repetition

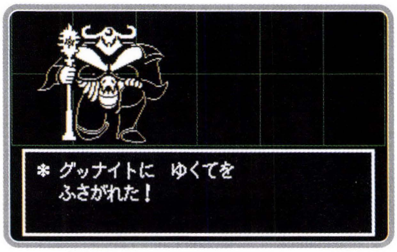
As a song, *Aisatsu no Mahō* was intended to teach children the importance of words like *konnichi wa* ("hello"), *itadakimasu* ("I humbly accept this food"), and *arigatō* ("thank you"). In the song, these phrases are referred to as "magic words" that can help you make friends. The lyrics also include the occasional *popopopo~n,* a made-up sound effect word that was intended to represent "the sound of lots of friends appearing". *Popopopo~n* was such an unavoidable phrase that it won first place in 2011's Japanese Internet Buzzword Awards.

Midknight Hour

On a side note, Knight Knight sometimes says "adieu" in the English game, which became "adios" in the Japanese script



* Knight Knight blocks the way!



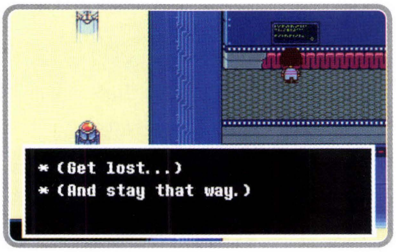
＊ グッナイトに　ゆくてを
ふさがれた！

A sleep-themed monster named "Knight Knight" appears in the Core. This name is a play on the phrase "night-night", which is a common way of saying "good night" to children.

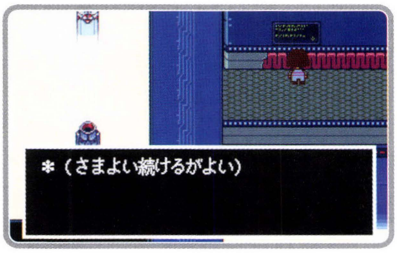
While the English phrase "night-night" isn't well known in Japan, the English phrase "good night" *has* been absorbed into the Japanese language. Because of this, the translator renamed the monster "Good Knight" in Japanese.

Not Losing It

As a translator, my internal "this is probably a reference to something" sense activates when I run across lone, carefully crafted lines like this



* (Get lost...)
* (And stay that way.)



＊（さまよい続けるがよい）

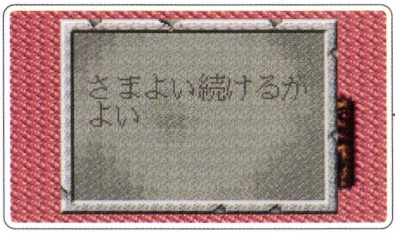
In the English script, a sign in the Core taunts the player with the message:

(Get lost...)
(And stay that way.)

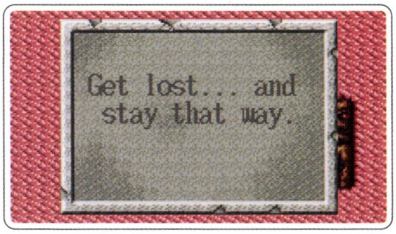
Toby noted that this is another direct quote from the English version of *Brandish*. With this obscure information in hand, the translator looked up the original Japanese *Brandish* quote, which translates as:

(May you wander continuously.)

Random Life Tip: if you lose something in your house, look in a 3-foot radius around where you normally expect it to be, it's likely there somewhere



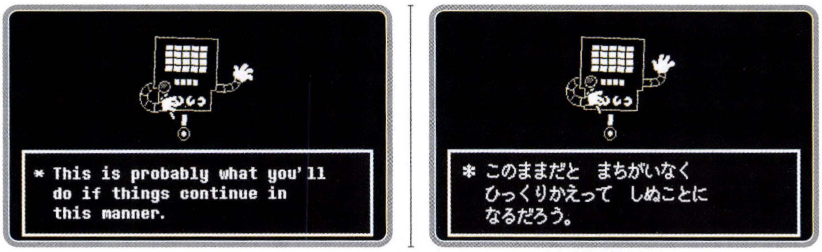
さまよい続けるが
よい



Get lost... and
stay that way.

Fortunately, this quote is consistent across the many Japanese versions of *Brandish*. This potentially makes it more recognizable than other *Brandish* references that were retained in *Undertale*'s Japanese script.

Getting Burned

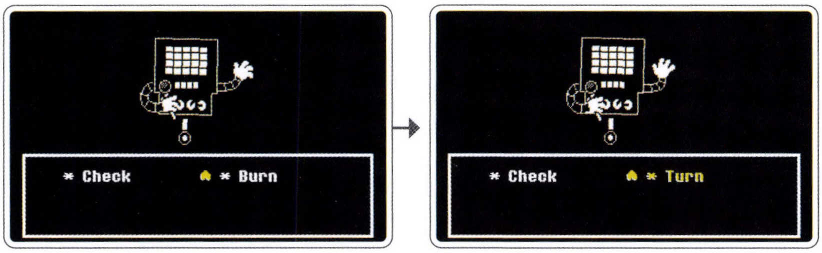

* This is probably what you'll do if things continue in this manner.

* このままだと　まちがいなく
ひっくりかえって　しぬことに
なるだろう。

Toby noted: "Burn becomes Turn so if you can think of something else that can turn into 'turn' that's a funnier pun that has to do with dying etc that'd be cool"

Mettaton attempts to kill the main character again. As before, the player has few options while battling Mettaton – the only notable action available is "Burn", which simply produces the message:

> *This is probably what you'll do if things continue in this manner.*

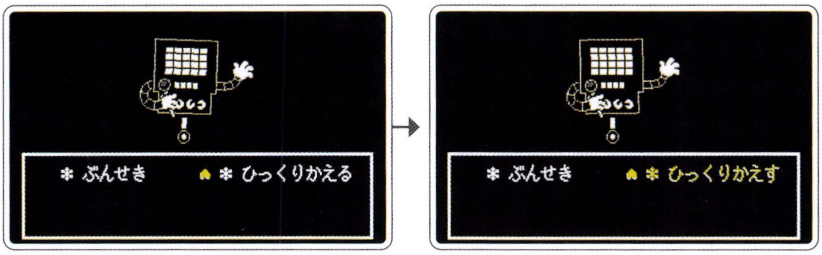


Similar to the previous Mettaton encounter, this "Burn" command eventually transforms into the similarly spelled "Turn" command

Eventually, Alphys informs the player that Mettaton has a switch on his back. The "Burn" menu option is then quietly replaced with the "Turn" option. This option will turn Mettaton around and reveal his power switch.

Because this subtle text change relies on "Burn" and "Turn" having similar spellings in English, this wordplay would be lost in a literal translation into Japanese. To compensate, the translator first replaced "Burn" with *hikkuri kaeru* ("to topple over; to fall down"). The translator then altered the original battle message to fit the new menu option:

> *If this keeps up, you will definitely topple over and die.*

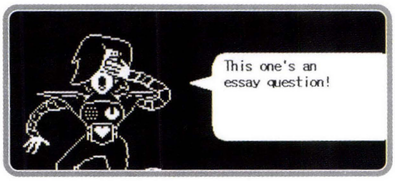


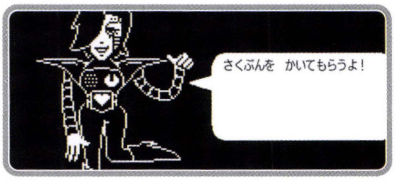
Even if you don't know Japanese, you can see how the right-hand menu option changes very slightly during this scene

After this, the translator changed the "Turn" command into *hikkuri kaesu* ("to flip over or around"). The resulting Japanese localization closely parallels Toby's original design: the first Japanese command does nothing, the second command looks similar to the first command at first glance, and the second command also causes Mettaton to be turned around.

Word Problems

What DO you like most about Mettaton? Write your answer below for future generations to read:


This one's an essay question!


さくぶんを かいてもらうよ!

During battle, Mettaton gains a humanoid body and becomes Mettaton EX. He then stops and asks the player a question:

> *"What do you love most about Mettaton?"*

The player is then asked to type an essay on their computer keyboard that answers this question. Once the essay is finished – or if time runs out – Mettaton EX will scan the player's essay for specific keywords and respond with appropriate dialogue. Toby originally designed this system to recognize English answers, so getting it to work properly in Japanese required all-new programming code and technical adjustments.

Keyboards

First, because *Undertale* was originally designed for home computers, players could simply use their computer keyboard to type an essay answer. Unfortunately, home consoles rarely come with keyboards. To get around this hardware issue, the localization team added new code to *Undertale*'s programming to display on-screen keyboards compatible with game controllers.

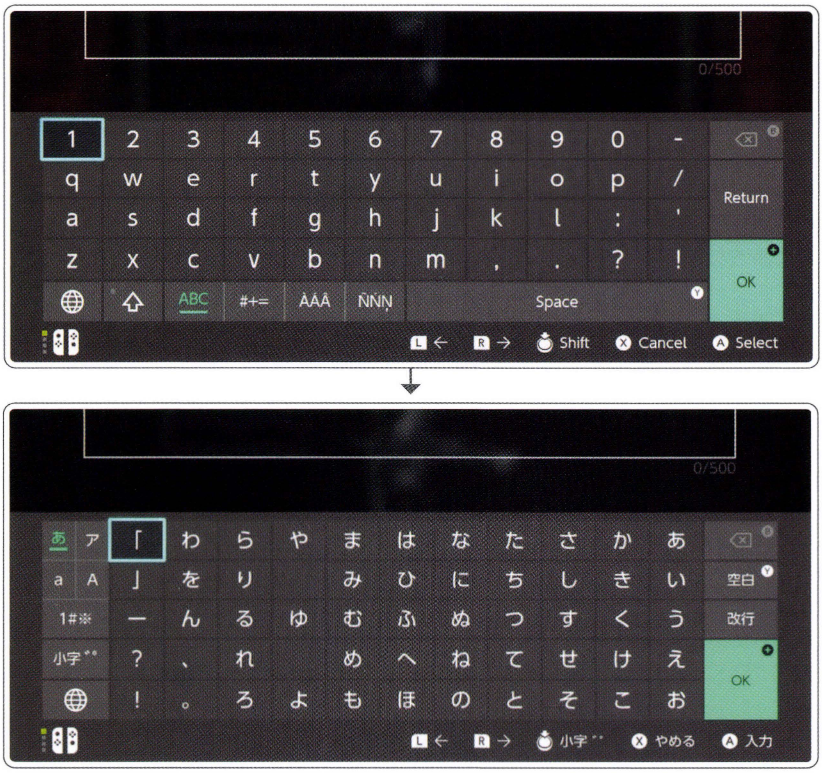
Japanese Input

The Japanese language includes three separate writing systems, which complicates the process of searching for keywords in the player's essay. For example, the word *bibō* ("good looks") can be written with a combination of all three systems, leading to multiple possible spellings:

- びぼう (all hiragana)
- ビボウ (all katakana)
- 美貌 (all kanji)
- 美ぼう (kanji + hiragana)
- 美ボウ (kanji + katakana)
- び貌 (hiragana + kanji)
- ビ貌 (katakana + kanji)

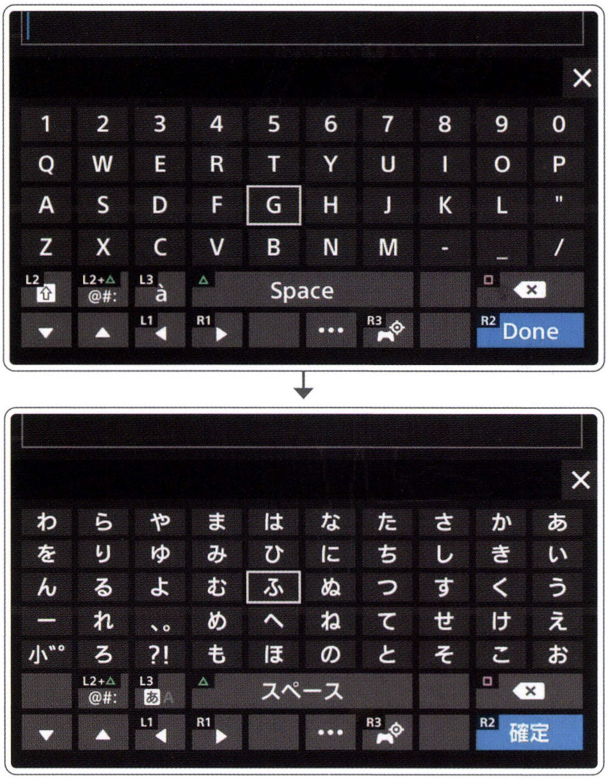
To simplify this technical problem, the localization team disabled *kanji* support. The team then added new programming that internally converts every *katakana* character to *hiragana*.

This technical solution simplified matters greatly, but it had an unexpected flaw: the game's core programming already uses the "Z" and "X" keys for other in-game functions. To get around this, the localization team made sure that no Japanese keywords required the "Z" or "X" keys. The team then added an on-screen message stating that "Z" and "X" are unavailable. Fortunately, these keys aren't 100% vital for Japanese input to begin with – there are often multiple ways to type a single word in Japanese.


0/500
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 -
q w e r t y u i o p /
a s d f g h j k l : '
z x c v b n m , . ? !
Return
OK
ABC #+= ÀÁÂ ÑŃŅ
Space
L ← R → Shift Cancel Select
0/500
あ ア 「 わ ら や ま は な た さ か あ
a A 」 を り み ひ に ち し き い
空白
1#※ ー ん る ゆ む ふ ぬ つ す く う
改行
小字゛゜ ? 、 れ め へ ね て せ け え
OK
! 。 ろ よ も ほ の と そ こ お
L ← R → 小字゛゜ やめる 入力

Each home console version of *Undertale* required re-programming to support on-screen keyboards

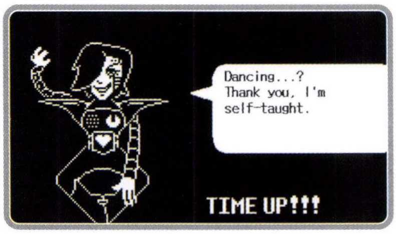
Here we see the English and Japanese keyboard layouts for the Nintendo Switch release


1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
Q W E R T Y U I O P
A S D F G H J K L "
Z X C V B N M - _ /
L2 L2+△ @#: L3 à △ Space □
L1 R1 ••• R3 R2 Done
わ ら や ま は な た さ か あ
を り ゆ み ひ に ち し き い
ん る よ む ふ ぬ つ す く う
ー れ 、。 め へ ね て せ け え
小゛゜ ろ ?! も ほ の と そ こ お
L2+△ @#: L3 あA △ スペース □
L1 R1 ••• R3 R2 確定

Here we see the English and Japanese keyboard layouts for the PlayStation 4 release of *Undertale*

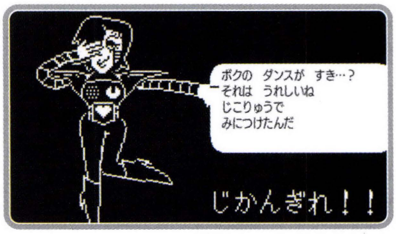
Key Words

Video game homework sounds fun and terrifying at the same time



Dancing...?
Thank you, I'm
self-taught.

TIME UP!!!



ボクの　ダンスが　すき…？
それは　うれしいね
じこりゅうで
みにつけたんだ

じかんぎれ！！

In the English version of *Undertale*, the game's programming searches for 69 keywords in the player's essay. In the Japanese version, there are 81 keywords. There are several reasons for this mismatch:

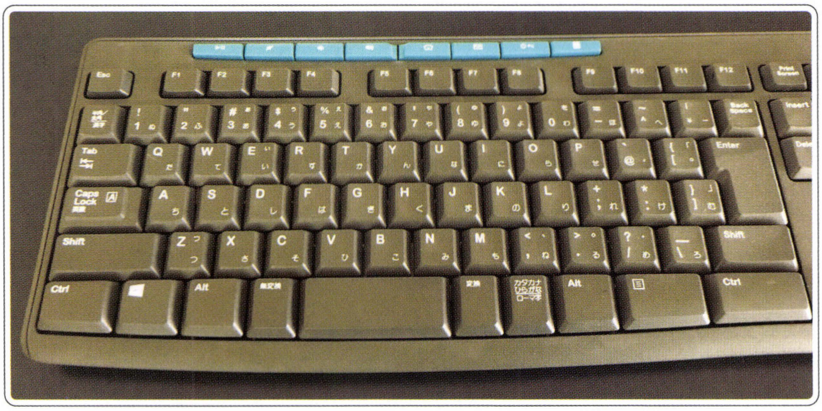
- The English language separates words with spaces, but spaces aren't required in Japanese – this complicates the keyword searching process and can result in false positives unless extra precautions are taken
- The Japanese language includes a dizzying number of homophones (words with the same pronunciation but different meanings), and the lack of *kanji* support makes it difficult to differentiate them
- The Japanese language has its own words for things, but it's also absorbed countless English words – this combination results in a slightly larger pool of available keywords

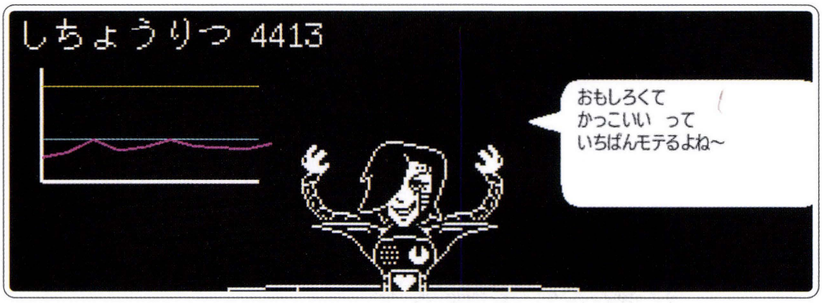
The Japanese version of *Undertale* also includes a new set of 14 keywords that result in all-new Mettaton EX responses. For example, if a Japanese player includes the word *nihongo* ("Japanese language") in the essay, Mettaton EX will respond with:

> *But of course! Any true star is well-versed in the language arts!*

When Toby originally designed this essay scene, he put a lot of thought into how it should work and how Mettaton EX should react as if he were an actual, living character. As we can see, the localization team put just as much care into how the Japanese scene should work technically *and* linguistically.

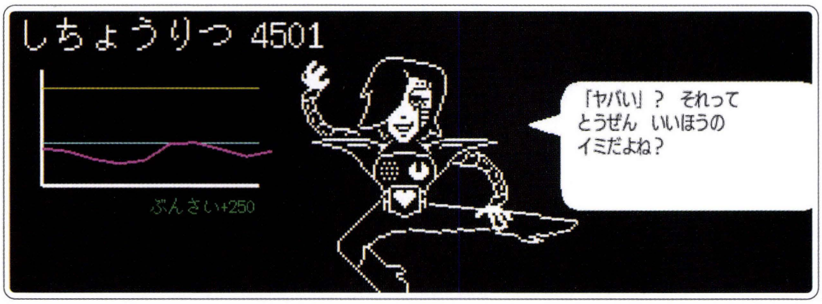
And for no real reason, here is what Japanese computer keyboards look like if you've never seen one before





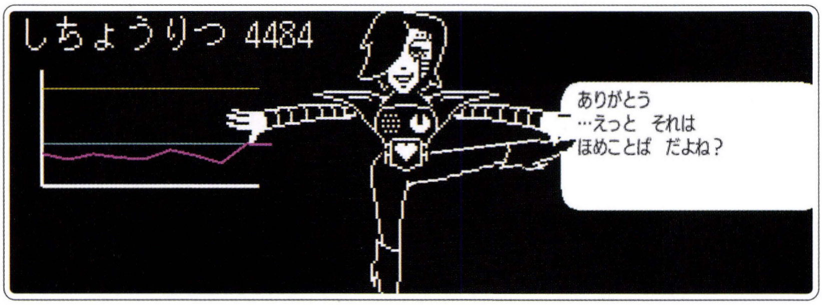
おもしろくて
かっこいい って
いちばんモテるよね～

If the player includes the word *omoshiroi* ("fun; funny; interesting"), Mettaton EX responds by saying, "Being funny and cool is the secret to being popular!"



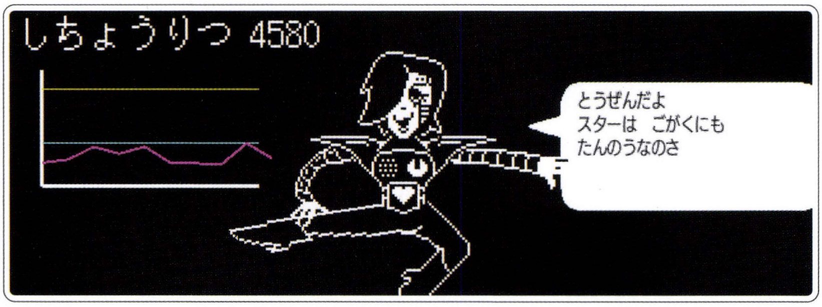
「ヤバい」？ それって
とうぜん いいほうの
イミだよね？

If the player uses the word *yabai* ("sick; crazy; awesome", can be used as slang to describe something good or bad), Mettaton EX will reply, "Sick? You mean that in the positive sense, I assume?"



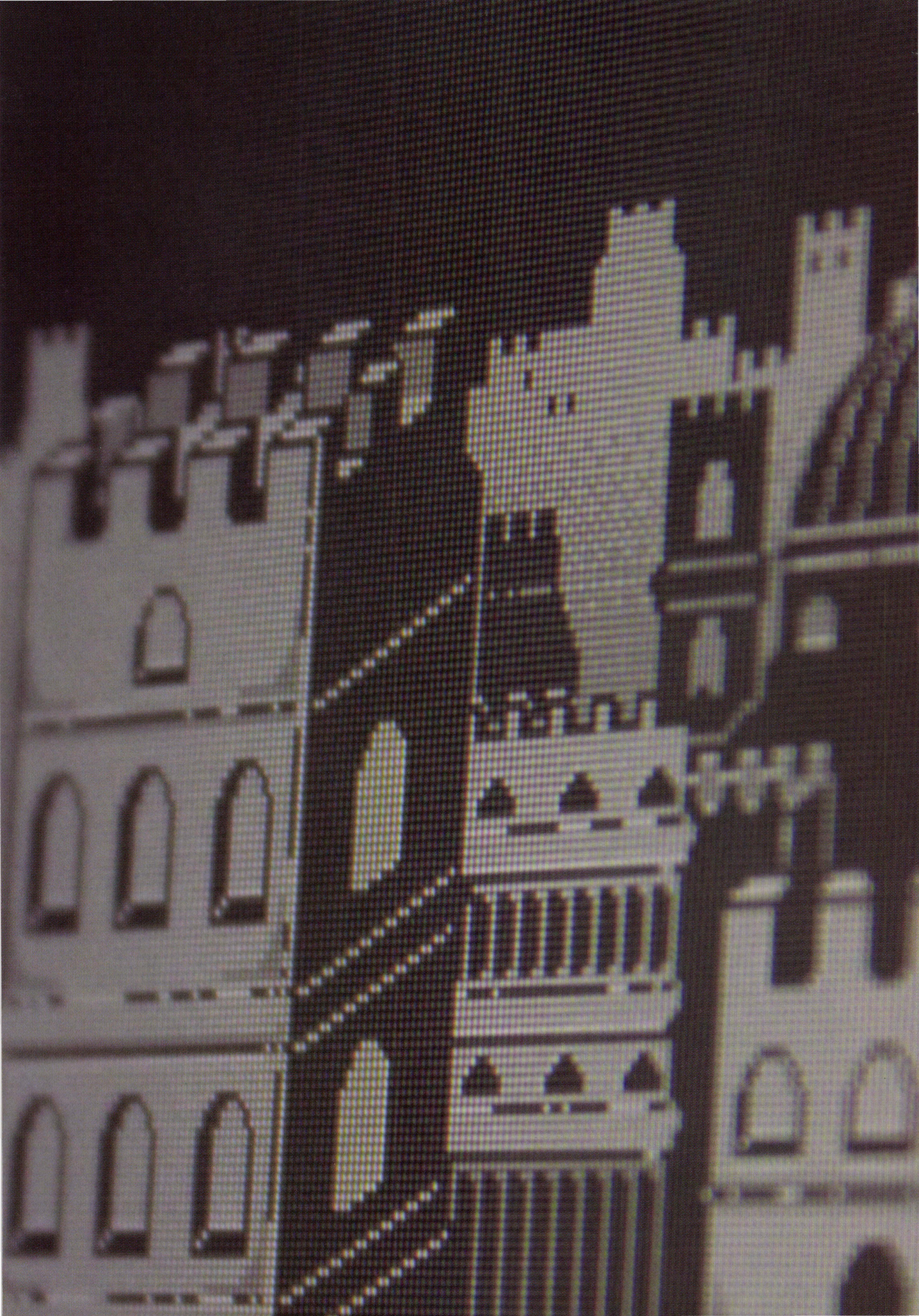
ありがとう
…えっと それは
ほめことば だよね？

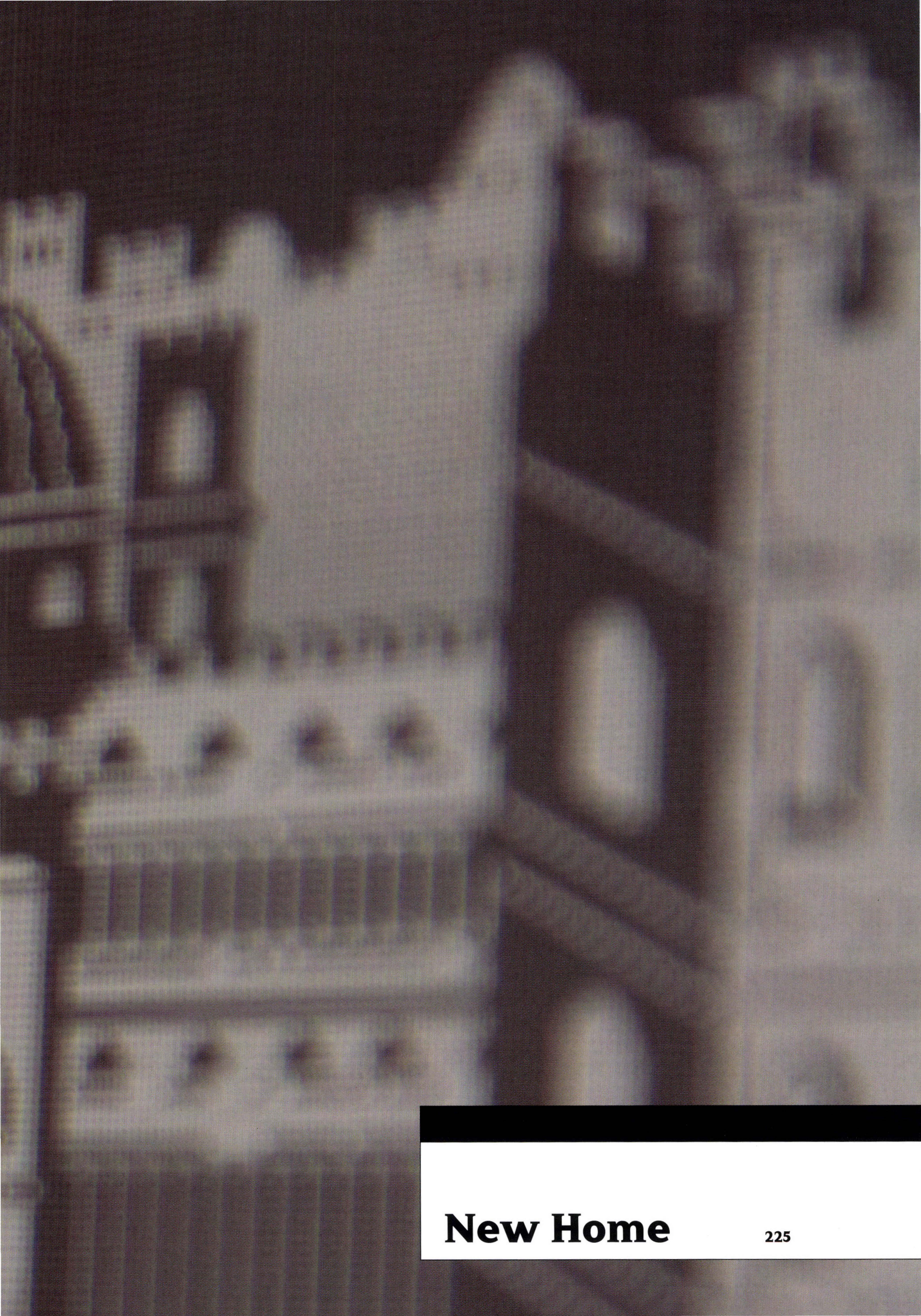
If the player uses the slang word *emoi* ("emotional"), Mettaton EX will say, "Thanks! ...Uhh, you meant that as a compliment, right?"



とうぜんだよ
スターは ごがくにも
たんのうなのさ

If the player uses the word *nihongo* ("the Japanese language"), Mettaton EX will respond with, "But of course! Any true star is well-versed in the language arts!"





New Home

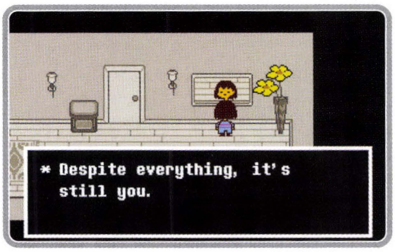
New Home

Human Enters Royal Abode

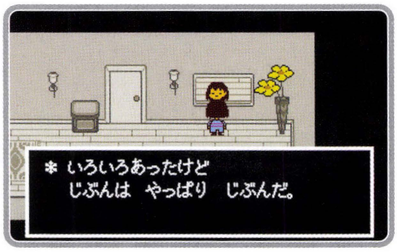
The main character passes through New Home, the royal capital of the Underground. A look around the castle reveals details about the royal family's tragic past.

Self Reflection

A lot gets lost when translated back into English, but this Japanese line basically says "a lot of things have happened, but self is self after all"



* Despite everything, it's still you.



＊ いろいろあったけど
じぶんは やっぱり じぶんだ。

In the English version of *Undertale*, checking a mirror in New Home produces the message:

> *Despite everything, it's still you.*

This short, five-word sentence is one of the most famous quotes in *Undertale*'s English script, largely because its intentional ambiguity can mean very different things to different players. Some possible interpretations include:

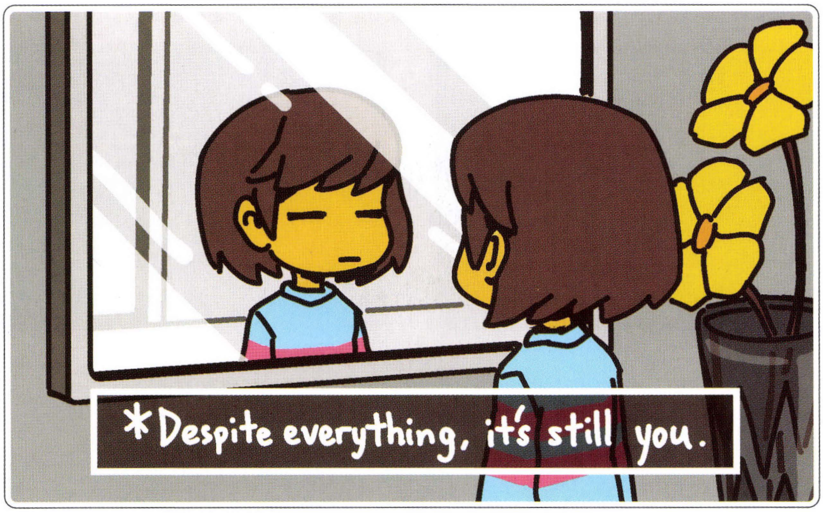
- "A lot's happened, but you've made it this far intact"
- "The main character/player has endured a lot, yet is unchanged deep down"
- "The main character/player has caused a lot to happen, yet is the same deep down"

This line could arguably be referencing the player's inner personality as well:

- "See, despite believing you're a good person, your choices show that you also have a dark side to you." (When a normally gentle player murders some monsters in the game just to see what happens)
- "See, despite acting like a tough guy on the exterior, you do have a caring side to you." (When a normally hot-tempered player spares every monster in the game)

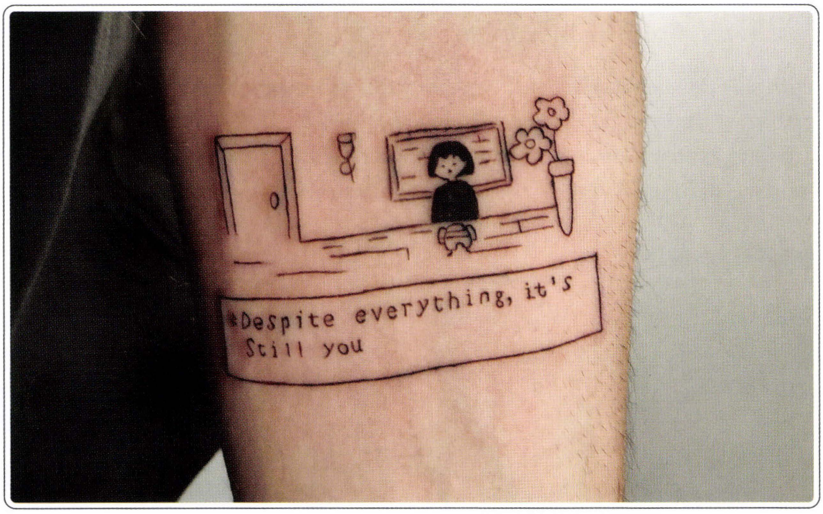
Many other potential interpretations exist too, of course. In short, with its simplicity and emotional depth, this "despite everything, it's still you" line has spawned countless pieces of fan fiction, fan art, and even permanent tattoos.

Naturally, Toby and the localization team put a lot of thought into this line to preserve its many potential nuances. In the end, the team decided to prioritize the content of the message over its sheer memorability. So although the resulting literal translation is less celebrated than its English counterpart, it does retain the intent of the original line, while still flowing naturally in Japanese.

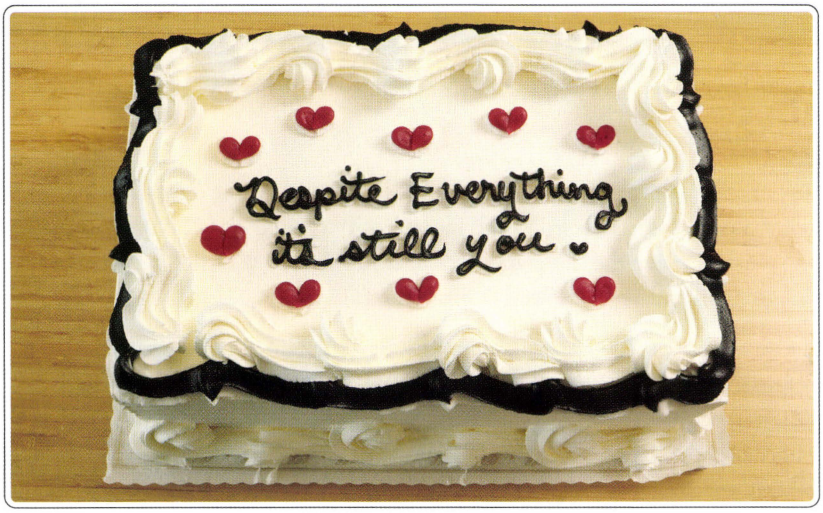

*Despite everything, it's still you.

English-speaking *Undertale* fans often draw art related to this single line of text

Reader Challenge #8: Consider who you are as a person right now – would you want to be your own friend if you somehow met yourself?


*Despite everything, it's Still you

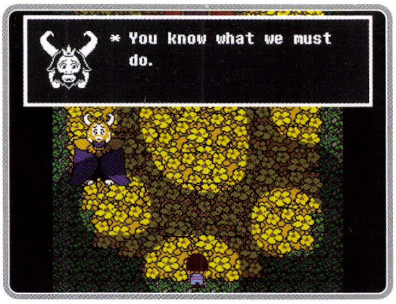
Tattoos of this scene are a common sight among English-speaking *Undertale* fan communities


Despite Everything it's still you.

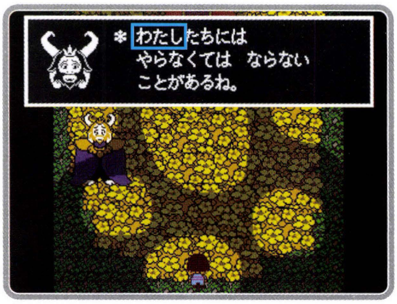
Some English-speaking fans even celebrate this memorable line with food

Asgore Speaks

King Asgore uses the polite pronoun わたし (*watashi*) in Japanese



＊ You know what we must do.



＊ わたしたちには
やらなくては　ならない
ことがあるね。

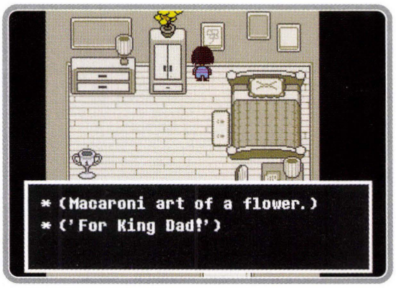
The king of the Underground, Asgore Dreemur, lives in New Home. In the translation spreadsheet, Toby explained how Asgore switches between two different speech patterns in English:

> *King. But his method of speech is kind of like "goofy, forgetful dad" with only certain points that he goes into "cold, distant/formal king." He's not really great at being a king.*

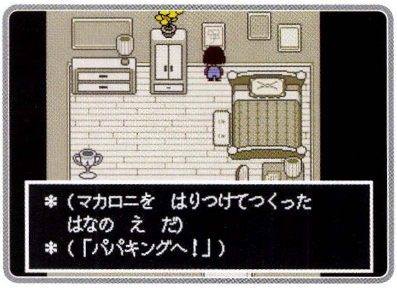
With this information in hand, the translator gave Asgore a polite speech pattern for most of his Japanese dialogue, which includes the use of the polite pronoun *watashi*. For other situations, the translator made sure that Asgore switches to a colder, but still formal speech pattern.

Mario Artist

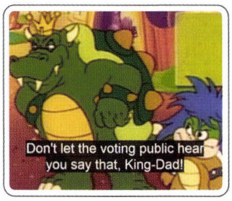
To be fair, this Mario reference probably went unnoticed by a large portion of the English-speaking audience



＊ (Macaroni art of a flower.)
＊ ('For King Dad!')



＊（マカロニを　はりつけてつくった
はなの　え　だ）
＊（「パパキングへ！」）



Don't let the voting public hear you say that, King-Dad!

Some of King Koopa's children called him "King Dad" in the old American animated series, but later games would clarify that they're just his minions and not actually his children

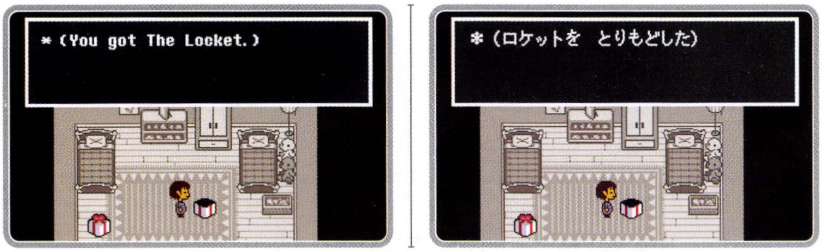
In the king's home, a child's art project hangs on a wall with a short message:

For King Dad!

Toby noted that the phrase "King Dad" is a reference to the *Super Mario Bros.* television cartoons that first aired in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Specifically, the phrase is from the *Adventures of Super Mario Bros. 3* series, in which the villain's children regularly call their father "King Dad".

Because this animated series was produced for Western audiences, this reference would be missed by most Japanese players. But rather than force a different reference into this important line, the translator focused on the key information and translated the line literally. Even without the reference, it's still clear in the Japanese script that Asgore and his child were part of a loving family.

The Importance of "The"



* (You got The Locket.)

＊（ロケットを　とりもどした）

The Japanese version of this line spells things out a tad more clearly for players, but it also keeps it vague enough for players to ponder the implication on their own

A very special locket is stored in a box in New Home. Inspecting the box during a standard playthrough will produce the message:

> *You got the Heart-shaped Locket.*

During a murderous No Mercy playthrough, it becomes clear that the player and the main character *aren't* one and the same. Further clues suggest that the locket and this other "entity" share a dark, complicated history. For these reasons, the standard locket message becomes:

> *You got The Locket.*

The capital "T" in "The Locket" might seem like a simple typo at first, making it easy for players – and translators – to overlook its importance. What's more, the Japanese language lacks both uppercase writing *and* articles like "a" and "the". Had *Undertale*'s localization been rushed, this combination of language quirks could've easily led to a generic-sounding game phrase:

> *Got* [a/the] *locket.*

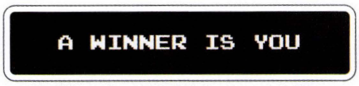
Fortunately, the team recognized the importance of the word "The" in this line. So, to preserve Toby's intention, the translator replaced the verb "got" with "took back". Thus, the Japanese version of this line became:

> *Took back* [a/the] *locket.*

Basically, by prioritizing the intent of the line over its literal wording, the localization team was able to preserve this important piece of background lore for Japanese players to analyze.

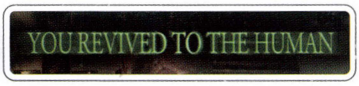
English Articles in Japanese Games

Because the Japanese language lacks articles like "a", "an", or "the", it's common to see these words mishandled in Japanese entertainment. In some cases, these erratic articles can be funny, memorable, and endearing for players outside of Japan.



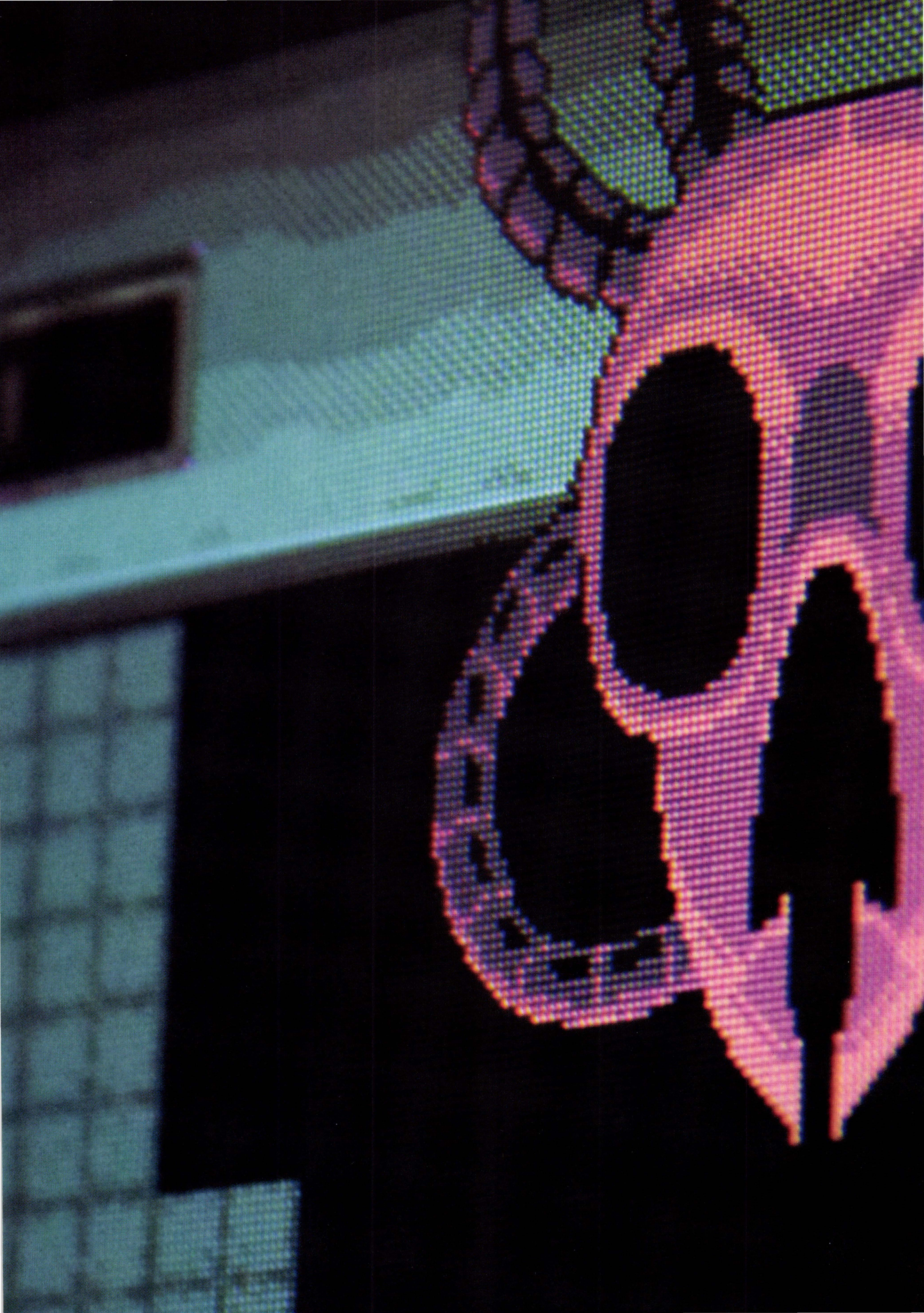
A WINNER IS YOU

Pro Wrestling (NES, 1987)



YOU REVIVED TO THE HUMAN

Dark Souls (multi-platform, JPN version, 2011)



True Lab

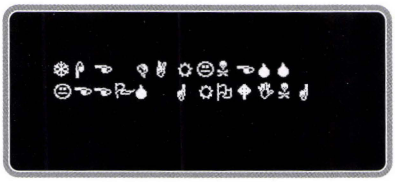
True Lab

Human Accesses Secret Scientific Research!

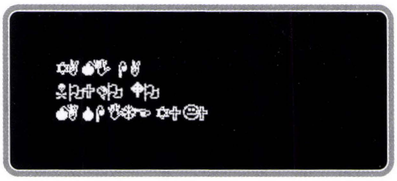
The human discovers a secret laboratory crawling with creepy creatures and twisted experiments. Beyond them lie the Underground's darkest secrets, waiting to be uncovered.

Translation by Complication

☟☜☹🏱 ❄⚐👌✡
☟✌💧 💣☜
❄☼✌🏱🏱☜👎 ✋☠
❄☟☜ ❄⚐💣✌❄⚐
👎✋💣☜☠💧✋⚐☠



❄☟☜ 👎✌☼😐☠☜💧💧
😐☜☜🏱💧 ☝☼⚐🕈✋☠☝



Undertale's English script contains many special lines of text that most players probably never see. A few of these special lines look like random, meaningless symbols when uncovered, but they're not meaningless at all. They simply use a computer font named "Wingdings" that contains nothing but symbols.

For example, the random sentence "I EAT BUGS EVERY DAY" looks like this in the Wingdings font:

✋ ☜✌❄ 👌🕆👍💧 ☜✞☜☼✡ 👎✌✡

Most players will probably never encounter these special messages in *Undertale* because they only appear under extremely rare conditions. In addition, these messages look like gibberish unless the player has a Wingdings conversion chart handy. Thus, it almost feels like these messages contain dark secrets intended to confuse the player.

Naturally, the localization team wanted to preserve the "dark, mysterious, and unreadable" vibe in Japanese too. There was one problem, though: the Wingdings font is incompatible with standard Japanese text.

The localization team found a simple solution to this font problem: decode the Wingding messages into English, translate those messages into Japanese, transcribe the Japanese messages using English letters, *then* display the new messages with the Wingdings font.

Original English Line	**Japanese Translation**	**English Transcription**	**Final Display in Game**
I AM A HORSE	私は馬だ	WATASHI HA UMA DA	🕈✌❄✌💧☟✋ ☟✌ 🕆💣✌ 👎✌

As a result of this localization change, the special Wingding messages look different in English and in Japanese. The content remains the same, though – inquisitive Japanese players who decipher the Japanese message will learn the same information as inquisitive English-speaking players.

Wingdings Symbol Chart

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
✌	👌	👍	👎	☜	☞	☝	☟	✋	☺

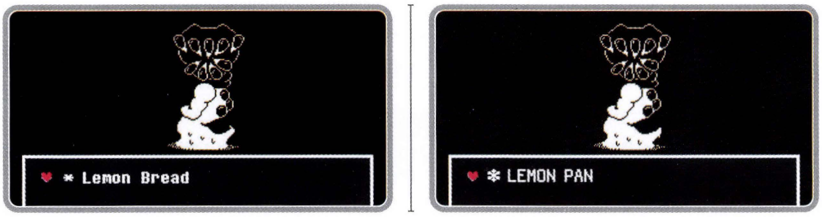
K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
😐	☹	💣	☠	🏳	🏱	✈	☼	💧	❄

U	V	W	X	Y	Z	#	.	,	:
🕆	✞	🕈	✠	✡	☪	✂	📬	📪	🖳

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
📁	📂	📄	🗏	🗐	🗄	⌛	🖮	🖰	🖲

The Wingdings font, which has come standard with Windows computers since the early 1990s, allows users to include symbols and icons in text documents

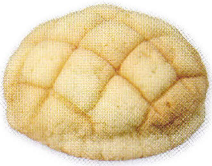
Bread-Based Tribute



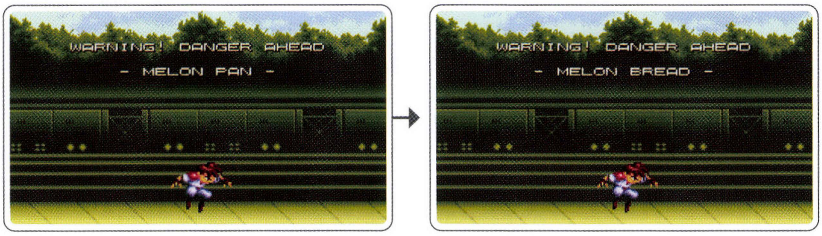
Reader Challenge #9: Come up with a bread pun for this caption before you finish this page!

In the English version of *Undertale*, an enemy named "Lemon Bread" blocks the way forward. In his notes, Toby stated that this name is a reference to the classic 1993 game, *Gunstar Heroes*.

In the original Japanese version of *Gunstar Heroes*, players can fight "MELON PAN", a bizarre enemy whose name comes from a popular Japanese snack of the same name. In the English-language release of *Gunstar Heroes*, "MELON PAN" was translated literally as "MELON BREAD".



Japanese *melon pan* is a sweet bread roll topped with crispy cookie dough

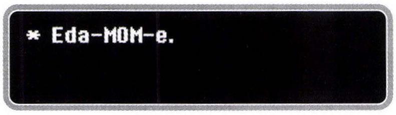


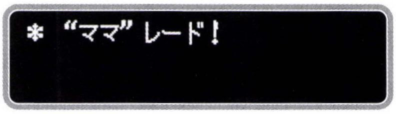
We can actually see one of Toby's early notes about this reference back in the Getting it Localized chapter

As a tribute to this localization choice in *Gunstar Heroes*, Toby requested that the "Lemon Bread" enemy in *Undertale* be renamed "LEMON PAN" in the Japanese script. This change ensures that Toby's *Gunstar Heroes* reference will remain intact and recognizable to Japanese players.

Comedy Clash

Bad jokes can be tricky to localize because they have to fall under a certain threshold to be considered a bad joke, which paradoxically requires comedic ability to achieve


* Eda-MOM-e.


* “ママ” レード！

In an old recording, Toriel and Asgore talk about their new child. Because Toriel is fond of bad jokes, several bad puns appear in this recording.

In the first joke, a pun on the English words “mom” and “edamame” was replaced with a Japanese pun on *mama* (“mom; mama”) and *māmarēdo* (“marmalade”):

English Text	Japanese Text (roughly translated)
Toriel: Gorey, dearest. What is my favorite vegetable?	Toriel: Say, Gorey. What is my favorite type of jam?
Asgore: Hmmm... Carrots, right? Toriel: No no no! My FAVORITE vegetable is... *Eda-MOM-e.*	Asgore: Hmm... Strawberry, right? Toriel: Bzz! Too bad! My favorite type of jam is... *“mama”lade!*

In the second joke, a pun on the English words “mom” and “Pomeranian” was replaced with a Japanese pun on the words *mama* and *amagaeru* (“tree frog”).

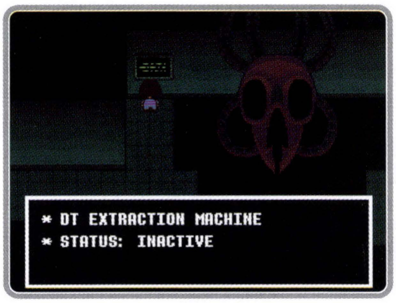
English Text	Japanese Text (roughly translated)
Toriel: Now, If I were a dog, what breed of dog would I be? Asgore: Hmmm... I don’t know, honey. What kind of dog would you be? Toriel: I would be... A *MOMERANIAN.*	Toriel: Now,if I were a frog, what kind of frog would I be? Asgore: Hmm... I don’t know. What kind of frog would you be? Toriel: A *“mama”gaeru.*

In the third joke, which is spoken entirely by Asgore, a pun on the English words “mom” and “comedian” was replaced with a Japanese pun on the words *mama* and *mama naranai* (“unlikely, impossible”):

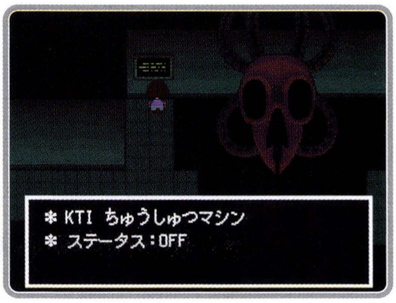
English Text	Japanese Text (roughly translated)
You sure are excited to have this child. You know, if you keep making jokes like this... One day, you could be... a famous *MOMedian.*	You really are happy to have this child. Honestly, though... If I keep putting up with your jokes like this... Any chances of me sleeping will be... *mama naranai.*

As we can see, the various mother-related puns in the English scene were paralleled in Japanese by using completely new jokes with completely new wording.

Context Extraction



* DT EXTRACTION MACHINE
* STATUS: INACTIVE



* KTI ちゅうしゅつマシン
* ステータス：OFF

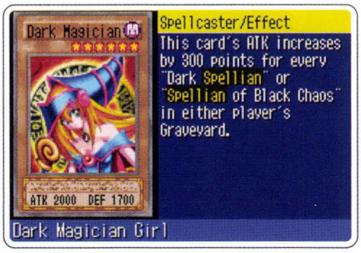
◀ ☼☜✌👎☜☼
👍☟✌☹☹☜☠☝☜
✂✆💻
🕈☼✋❄☜
✡⚐🕆☼ ☠✌💣☜
👌✡ ☟✌☠👎
🕆💧✋☠☝
🕈✋☠☝👎✋☠☝
👍☟✌☼✌👍❄☜☼💧
☟☜☼☜💻

The secret lab is equipped with an ominous device known as the "DT Extraction Machine" in English. The player is supposed to deduce that "DT" stands for "Determination".

Because "determination" was translated as *ketsui* elsewhere in the Japanese script, this machine was renamed the "KTI Extraction Machine". This peculiar abbreviation comes from how *ketsui* is spelled in the Japanese script: *ケツイ (Ke Tsu I)*.

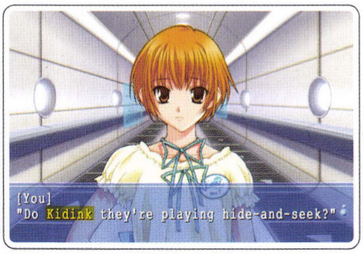
This simple localization change offers another example of how a single localization choice in one part of a script can unexpectedly affect other parts. Such unexpected side effects can easily be missed by machine translation systems, rushed translators using primitive "search-and-replace" tools, or inexperienced translators.

The Dangers of Search-and-Replace in Translation



Dark Magician
Spellcaster/Effect
This card's ATK increases by 300 points for every "Dark Spellian" or "Spellian of Black Chaos" in either player's Graveyard.
ATK 2000 DEF 1700
Dark Magician Girl

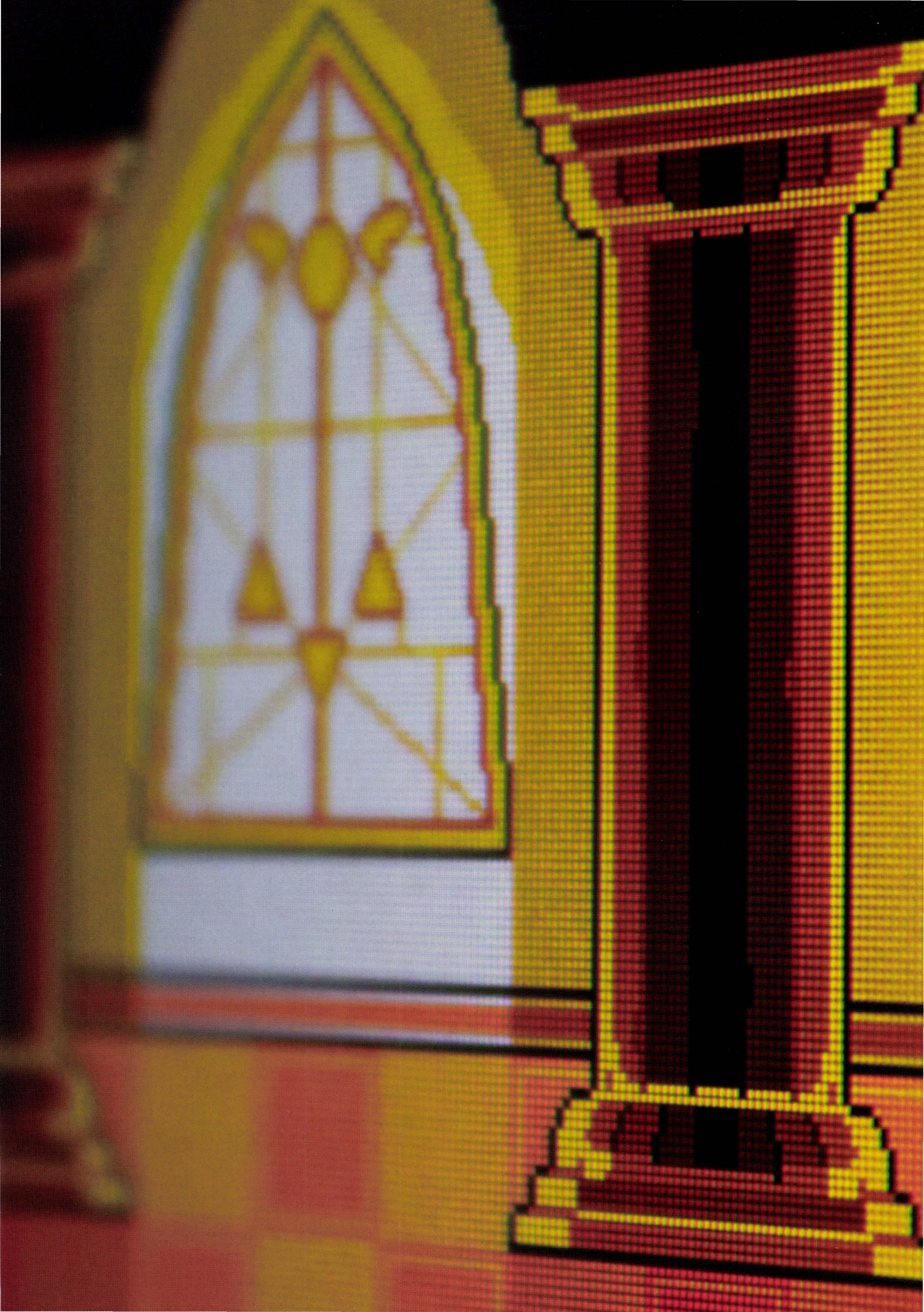
Someone searched for "magic" and replaced most instances with "spell", leading to unintended results like "spellian" instead of "magician" (Game: *Yu-Gi-Oh! World Tournament 2004*)



[You]
"Do Kidink they're playing hide-and-seek?"

Someone searched for "youth" at some point and replaced most instances with "kid", which somehow led to phrases like "you think" becoming "kidink" (Game: *Ever 17: The Out of Infinity*)

In today's computer age, writers regularly rely on automatic spell-checking and search-and-replace tools to fix problematic text. Translators rely on these tools all the time, too. Of course, these tools can actually introduce new problems into a translation if used improperly. This phenomenon is rare, but when it occurs, it can harm the quality of the full, final product.



Final Battles

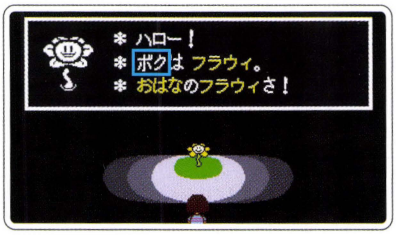
Final Battles

Unstoppable Human Encounters Last Line of Defense!

At last, the main character reaches the barrier that separates the human world from the monster world. The player's choices over the course of the game now steer the player toward several different climactic battles.

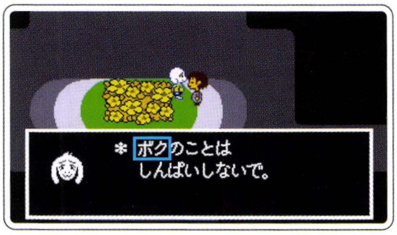
Flowey Speaks Again

As we've already seen in the Japanese script, Flowey has used the boyish pronoun *boku* throughout the game so far. For first-time players, *boku* seems to reflect Flowey's friendly personality at the beginning of the game. However, there's another reason that Flowey uses *boku*: it turns out that he's actually the king's young son, stuck in the body of a flower.



＊ ハロー！
＊ ボクは フラウィ。
＊ おはなのフラウィさ！

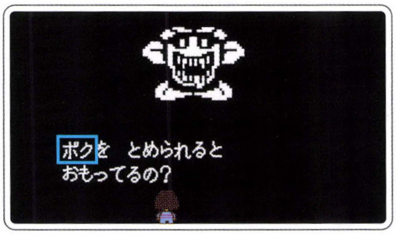
Flowey uses the boyish pronoun ボク(*boku*) at the start of the game



＊ ボクのことは
しんぱいしないで。

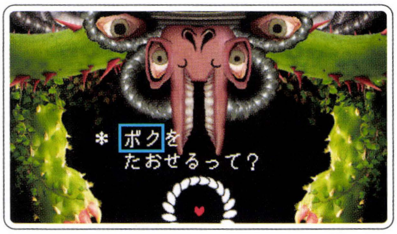
Flowey was actually a little boy before he got transformed, so it makes perfect sense for him to keep using *boku*

In Japanese entertainment, it's normal for characters to switch to an aggressive personal pronoun after turning evil or being corrupted by immense power. In this case, however, Flowey continues to use the timid pronoun *boku* even after becoming a god-like entity:



ボクを とめられると
おもってるの？

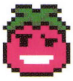
Flowey continues to use *boku* even when he gets sinister



＊ ボクを
たおせるって？

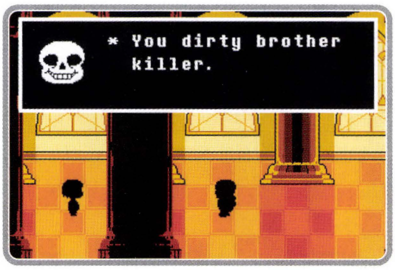
Even when he's a terrifying creature of untold power, Flowey keeps using *boku*

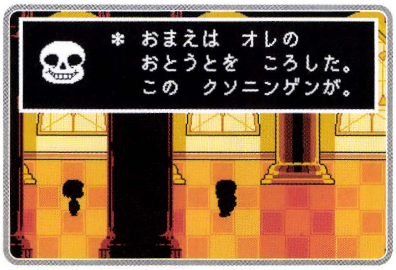
Because the Japanese language has a wider variety of personal pronouns than the English language, this unwavering use of *boku* gives Japanese players an extra layer of insight into Flowey's character that isn't seen in the English script.



This scene offers another example of how the localization process can shine light on extra details that were there all along but were otherwise invisible. It's kind of like a microscope or a night-vision camera in that sense. In this chapter, we'll continue to see how pronouns enhance the Japanese dialogue.

Attitude Adjustment

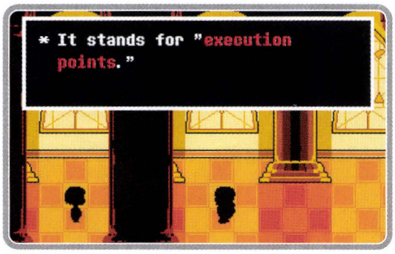

* You dirty brother
killer.

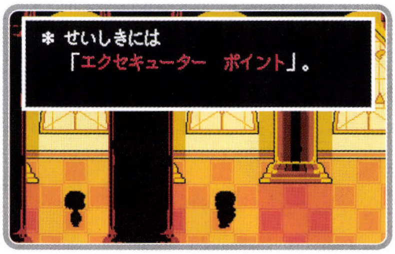

＊ おまえは　オレの
おとうとを　ころした。
この　クソニンゲンが。

When Sans says this out-of-character line during a No Mercy playthrough, he also switches to a very different font and uses proper punctuation

Sans suddenly stops acting like a goofball, turns deadly serious, and begins to speak in an intimidating tone of voice. To preserve this attitude change in the Japanese script, the translator replaced his normal Japanese speech patterns with harsher speech patterns. For example, instead of his usual, laid-back personal pronoun *oira*, Sans now uses the more assertive pronoun *ore*. And instead of referring to the main character with the casual second-person pronoun *anta*, he now uses the more condescending pronoun *omae*.

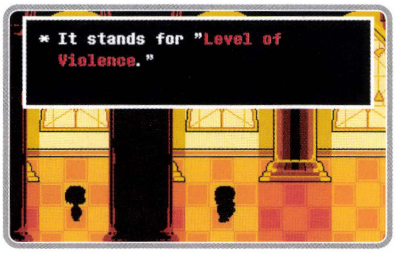
Abbreviation Revelation

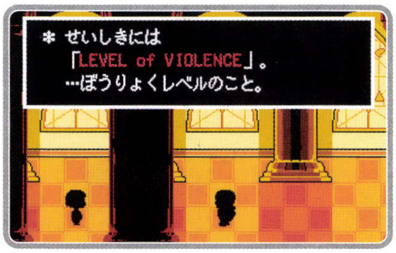

* It stands for "execution
points."


＊ せいしきには
「エクセキューター　ポイント」。

Technically, "execution points" were renamed "executor points" in Japanese, but the "EXP" abbreviation still works the same way

In many role-playing games, the player must earn "EXP" (short for "Experience Points") to increase their "LV" (short for "Level"). These standard terms appear in *Undertale* too, but it's eventually revealed that "EXP" and "LV" actually stand for "execution points" and "level of violence" here in the Underground.

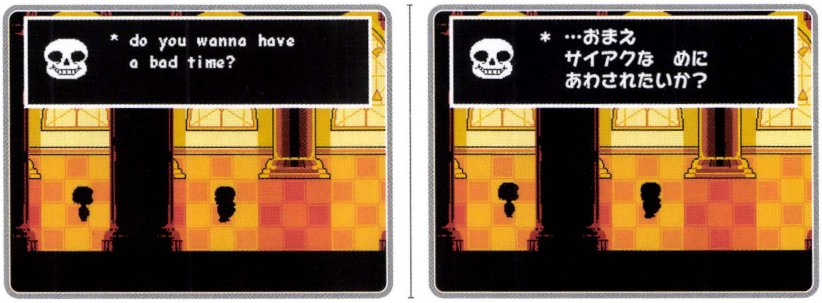

* It stands for "Level of
Violence."


＊ せいしきには
「LEVEL of VIOLENCE」。
…ぼうりょくレベルのこと。

Flowey says "LV" stands for "Love" at the start of the game, but the true meaning of "LV" is only revealed now

Because both of these surprise meanings rely on English abbreviations and English spelling, this wordplay would likely be lost in a straightforward, literal translation. To compensate for this, the localization team kept the English words mostly as-is, then included their Japanese meanings afterward for clarification. This solution preserves Toby's original intent without forcing Japanese words to awkwardly fit the English abbreviations.

A Bad Time


* do you wanna have
a bad time?

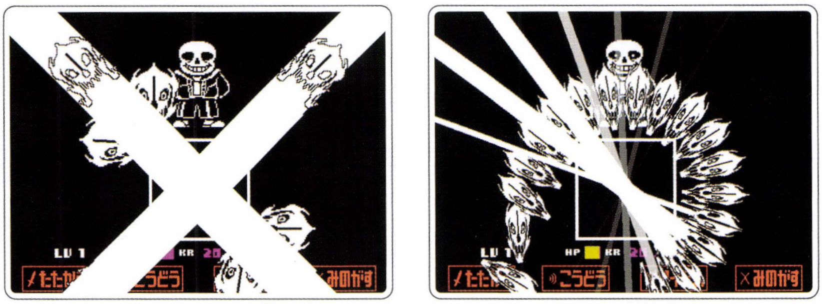
* …おまえ
サイアクな　めに
あわされたいか？

In the translation spreadsheet, Toby labeled this text the "Famous Meme Line Of Game"

Before Sans challenges the murderous main character in battle, he asks:

> *do you wanna have a bad time?*

Despite his laid-back attitude throughout the game, it turns out that Sans is extremely powerful. In fact, Sans is so difficult to fight that it usually takes players dozens of attempts to defeat him. Sometimes, the battle is so tough that some players just give up entirely.



Players who murder every monster they see are rewarded with one of the most frustrating boss battles of all time

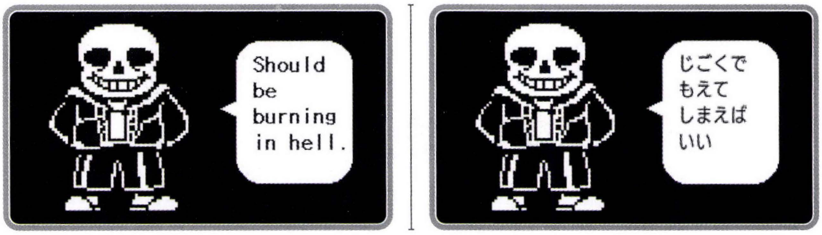
This battle with Sans is memorable, epic, and frustrating, so his casual question has become one of *the* most famous lines in the game. As such, "do you wanna have a bad time" has spawned countless English-language fan drawings, videos, and meme images over the years.

Naturally, Toby commented on this line's importance and worked with the localization team to get it just right. Because Sans' English line isn't technically a direct threat, the Japanese line needed to achieve a similar "you have to read between the lines" effect. Eventually, the team settled on a relatively straightforward translation:

> *omae saiaku na me ni awasaretai ka?*
> (roughly, "do you want to suffer a terrible fate?" or "do you want to have a terrible time?")

This final Japanese line conveys everything found in the English line, but rolls off the tongue differently. Even so, Japanese fans do quote the line regularly, although it's usually only the *saiaku na me* ("terrible time") portion rather than the full quote itself.

On Days Like This



Should be burning in hell.

じごくで
もえて
しまえば
いい

Sans suddenly starts speaking with dead eyes, a different font, and proper capitalization

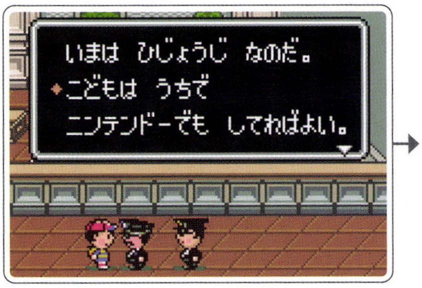
Sans gives a short speech before the battle begins. His speech begins pleasantly enough, but takes a sudden turn at the end:

> *it's a beautiful day outside.*
> *birds are singing, flowers are blooming...*
> *on days like these, kids like you...*
> *Should be burning in hell.*

This scene has two important elements to it. First, it contains an "extreme tonal shift", as Toby puts it. Second, the scene is an indirect reference to a popular quote from *EarthBound*:

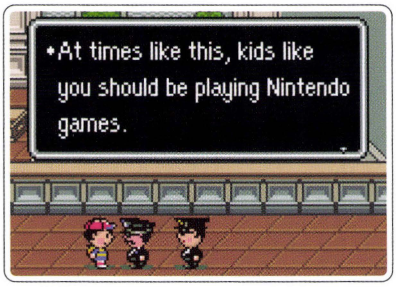
> *At times like this, kids like you should be playing Nintendo games.*

To preserve Toby's intentional reference, the localization team replaced the English *EarthBound* reference with its equivalent Japanese line:



いまは ひじょうじ なのだ。
◆こどもは うちで
ニンテンドーでも してれば よい。

"There's an emergency going on. Kids like you should be playing Nintendo at home or something." (*MOTHER 2*, 1994)



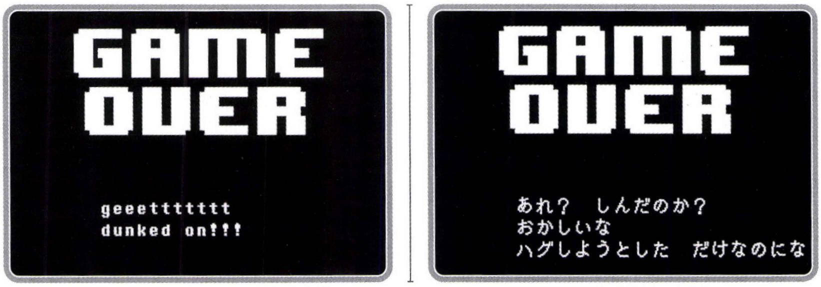
◆At times like this, kids like
you should be playing Nintendo
games.

"At times like this, kids like you should be playing Nintendo games." (*EarthBound*, 1995)

Unfortunately, the original Japanese version of this *EarthBound* quote is spoken by a cranky, middle-aged police chief with a different speech pattern than Sans', so the translator was forced to adjust the quote to match Sans' character. Thus, Toby's *EarthBound* reference still lives on in the Japanese script, just in a less recognizable form.

Sans has many intimidating lines during this scene in the game. What's more, most players probably end up seeing this scene dozens of times before defeating Sans. So it's no surprise that this section of the game is where some imprinted fan-translation players criticize the official translation the most, and vice-versa.

Come On and Jam


GAME OVER

geeettttttt
dunked on!!!

GAME OVER

あれ？　しんだのか？
おかしいな
ハグしようとした　だけなのにな

The phrase "to get dunked on" is still new enough that many English-speaking players have probably never heard of it before

If the player can survive against Sans for long enough, Sans will grow visibly exhausted. At this point, the player can choose to spare Sans rather than defeat him. It's all a trick, though – Sans isn't actually tired and will launch a lethal surprise attack upon being spared. On the resulting game over screen, Sans shouts in English:

> *geeettttttt dunked on!!!*

Getting "dunked on" is humiliating in the human sport of basketball

In basketball, it's humiliating if someone performs a slam dunk over you. Thus the phrase "to be dunked on" is a humorous way of saying "you've been completely dominated" or "you're nothing to me". As it's a relatively new slang phrase and isn't often seen in video games, this surprise appearance adds extra humor to the line.

In his the translation spreadsheet, Toby included a note about Sans' "get dunked on" quote:

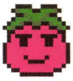
> *Famous line, always makes people laugh really hard the first time*

Unfortunately, there's no direct equivalent of the phrase "get dunked on" in Japanese. The localization team cycled through a number of potential Japanese replacements, most of which were variations on "ha, I fooled you" or insults based on Internet slang. Nothing quite had the same "bite" as the original English quote, however.

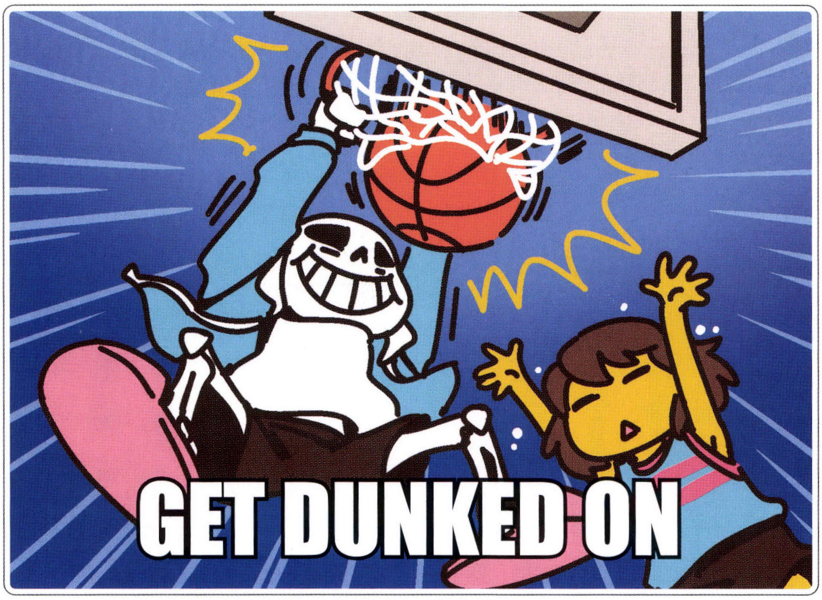
As the project neared completion, Toby worked with the localization team to finally solve this conundrum. At Toby's suggestion, the team dropped Sans' English quote entirely and replaced it with something different but still suitable:

> *Huh? You died? That's weird. All I did was try to hug you...*

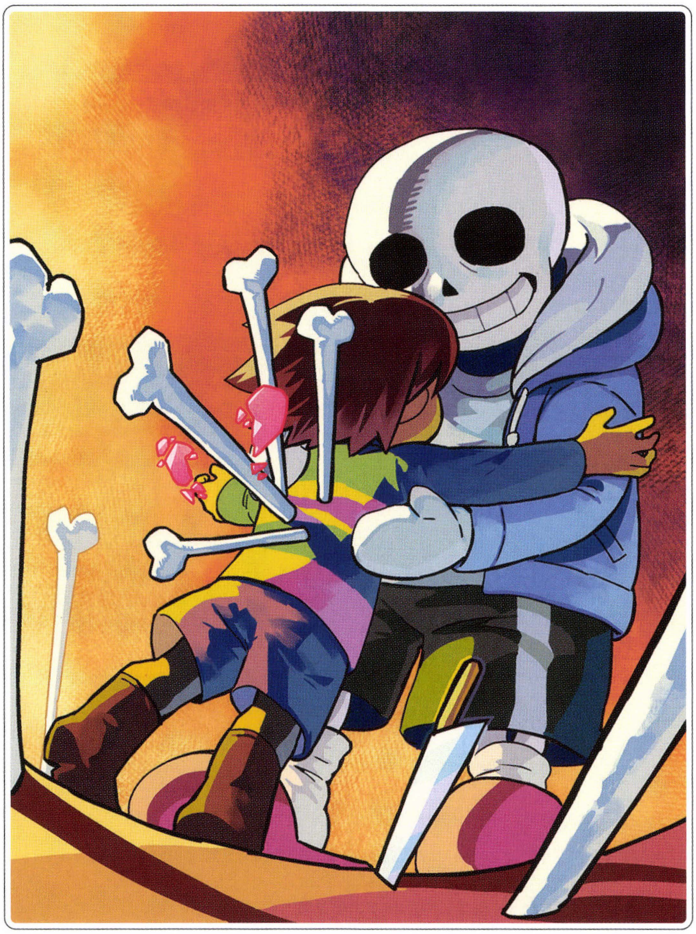
Even though this new line uses completely different wording to say something completely different, the reward is still the same for the player: a funny, memorable insult after a humiliating defeat.



Incidentally, when translators and creators work together like this to invent something new, some professional circles refer to the process as "transcreation" rather than "localization".



English-speaking fans sometimes draw Sans dunking on the main character in a basketball game



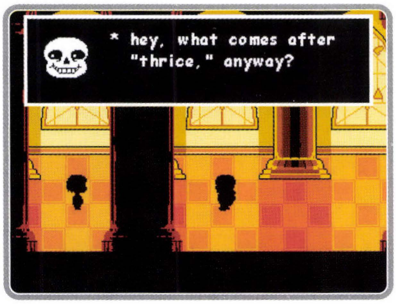
Because Sans' line is completely different in the Japanese release, Japanese fans sometimes draw Sans hugging the main character to death instead

Losing Over and Over

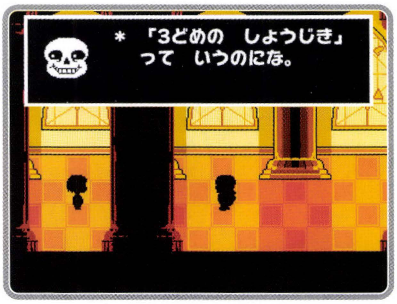
Sans is so powerful that he literally counts how many times he defeats the player. He uses this information to taunt the player with number-related jokes after each defeat. Naturally, some of these jokes needed to be changed to make sense in Japanese.

Three Losses

I don't think I've ever used the word "thrice" in a normal, everyday English conversation. Have you?



* hey, what comes after "thrice," anyway?



＊ 「3どめの　しょうじき」
って　いうのにな。

If the player speaks to Sans after losing three times, he says in English:

> *hey, what comes after "thrice," anyway?*

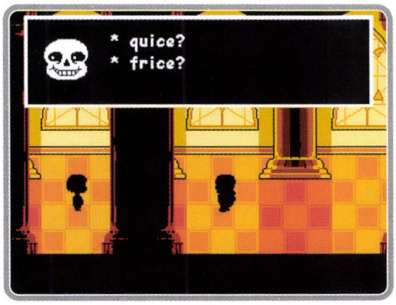
The joke here is that the English word "thrice" is rarely ever used. Because this cultural joke would be lost in a literal translation, the quote was rephrased as:

> *i guess the third time isn't always the charm.*

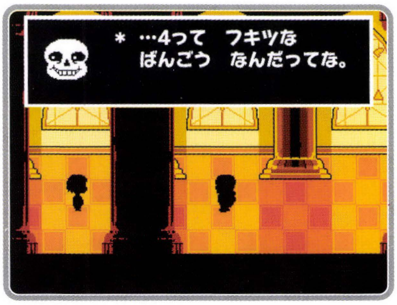
To replicate the dry humor of the English line, the translator included a joke on a Japanese idiom that's equivalent to the phrase "the third time's the charm".

Four Losses

Four is an unlucky number in Japanese because "four" and "death" can both be pronounced *shi*



* quice?
* frice?



＊ …4って　フキツな
ばんごう　なんだってな。

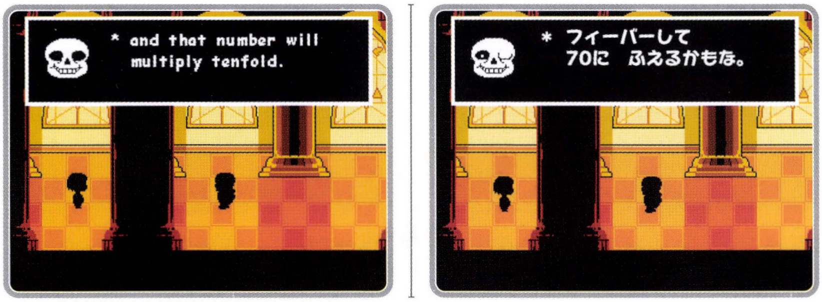
After the player loses four times in a row, Sans tries to figure out a fancy English word for "four times":

> *quice? frice? welp, won't have to use it again anyways.*

Because this joke would be lost in translation, Toby provided a replacement line based on Japanese superstition about the number four:

> *they say four is an unlucky number, you know. want to see if it's true or not?*

Seven Losses


* and that number will multiply tenfold.

* フィーバーして 70に ふえるかもな。

◂ Pachinko is kind of like that Plinko game on *The Price Is Right*, but with bright lights and sounds to keep your brain addicted

Sans eventually makes a joke about seven being a lucky number:

> *who knows, maybe you'll hit the jackpot and that number will multiply tenfold.*

Seven is a lucky number in Japan too, so this line stayed similar in Japanese:

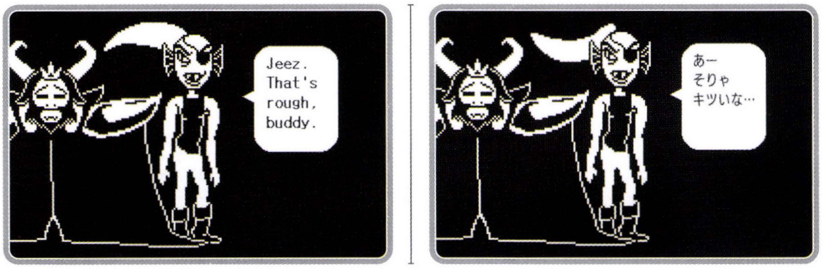
> *who knows, maybe you can get into "fever mode" and turn it into 70.*

In the original English line, Sans refers to Western-style slot machines. In the Japanese line, he instead refers to Japanese pachinko and pachinko-related gambling machines.

777
FEVER POWERFUL
777

▴ Hitting the "fever mode" in a pachinko game usually activates various multipliers, bonuses, or payouts for a short time

Rough Romance


Jeez. That's rough, buddy.

あー そりゃ キツいな…

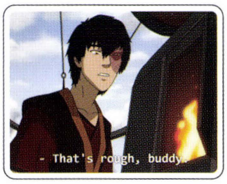
After Undyne learns that Toriel and Asgore were once married, she says:

> *Hey ASGORE, is that your ex? Jeez. That's rough, buddy.*

Toby noted that this line is a direct quote from *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, an American animated series that debuted in 2005. Specifically, the quote comes from this scene:

> *Sokka: My first girlfriend turned into the moon.*
> *Zuko: That's rough, buddy.*

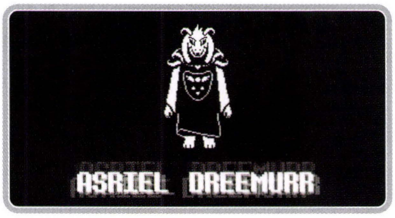
The ridiculousness of this scene transformed "that's rough, buddy" into a popular Internet meme in the late 2000s. However, because this quote isn't as well-known in Japan, Toby asked the team to prioritize the content of Undyne's text over the need to retain the reference.

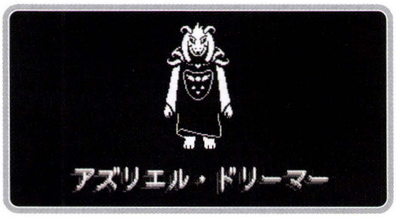

- That's rough, buddy.

▴ This line became a popular Internet meme in English-speaking locales but not so much in Japan

Temporary Arrangement

Books and schools usually only prep you to translate old historical novels and stuff, not bad- guy anagrams

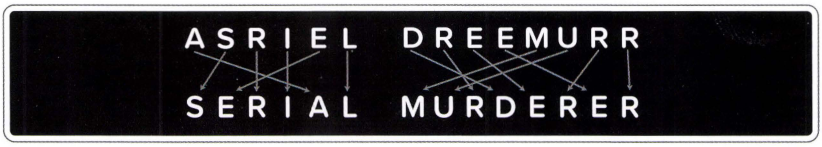




It turns out that Toriel and Asgore once had a kindhearted child named Asriel. But through a series of tragic events, Asriel was transformed into the wrathful Flowey. Now, near the end of the game, Asriel gains immense, godlike power – enough for him to destroy everything and everyone for good.

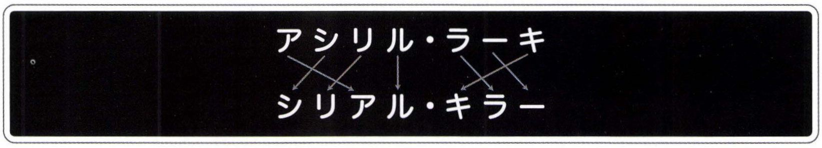
As Asgore's son, Asriel's full name is "Asriel Dreemur". Keen-eyed players have noticed that "Asriel Dreemur" is an anagram of "Serial Murderer", and Toby has confirmed that this was intentional:

Toby's fondness for anagrams continues to reveal itself



To preserve this hidden aspect of Asriel's character, the localization team considered giving Asriel a new Japanese name with a similarly frightening anagram. Thus, in early drafts of the Japanese script, Asriel Dreemur was named アシリル・ラーキ (*Ashiriru Rāki*, roughly "Aseril Lerki"), which could be rearranged to spell シリアル・キラー (*shiriaru kirā*, "serial killer").

Dots are sometimes used in Japanese to separate parts of names



This localization choice offered two benefits: it retained the murderous anagram, and it kept the first name roughly similar in both languages.

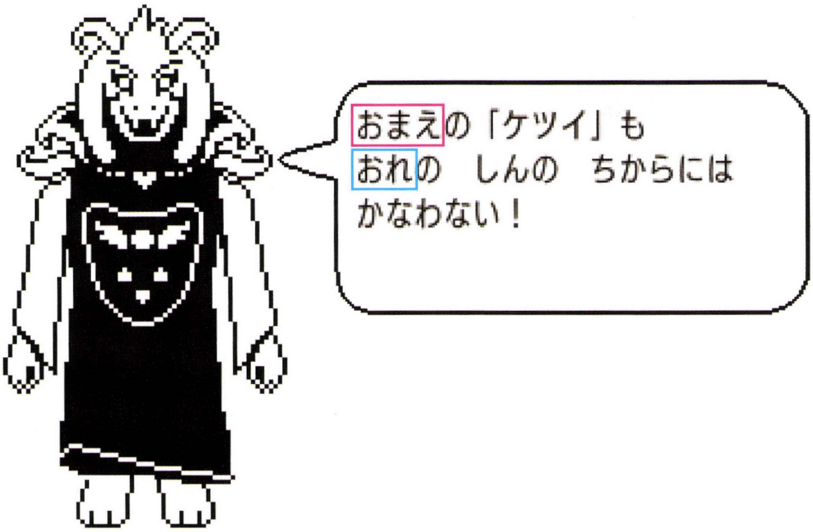
Of course, this localization choice had downsides too: players in Japan would know this important character by a very different last name, and the name *Rāki* doesn't evoke the same whimsical feeling that "Dreemur" does. More importantly, however, Toby chose the name "Asriel" with two other special meanings in mind:

- "Asriel" is a reference to Azrael, the mythological angel of death
- "Asriel" is a combination of the names "Asgore" and "Toriel"

Everyone agreed that localizing "Asriel Dreemur" into a Japanese anagram brought more downsides than benefits. For this reason, the localization team dropped the anagram aspect of Asriel's name and kept his name in line with his original English name.

Asriel Speaks

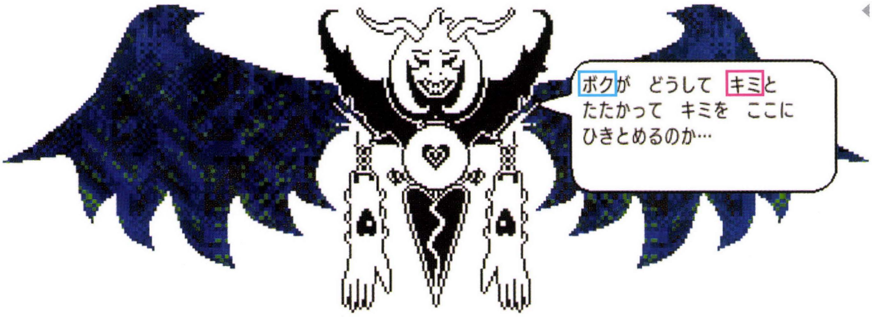
During the big, final battle, Asriel speaks with strong conviction and disgust for the main character. To replicate this in Japanese, the translator gave Asriel a disrespectful speech pattern which includes the use of the assertive personal pronoun *ore*.



In addition to using the first-person pronoun *ore*, Asriel uses the rude pronoun *omae* to say "you"

Little by little, though, the player is able to chip away at Asriel's hatred. Eventually, Asriel begins to speak with hesitation and less confidence. This is then followed by strong regret and shame for his actions.

The translator paralleled this emotional change in Japanese by easing up on the disrespectful speech patterns. As part of this, Asriel eventually switches his personal pronoun to *boku*, which conveys a more innocent image befitting a scared young boy.

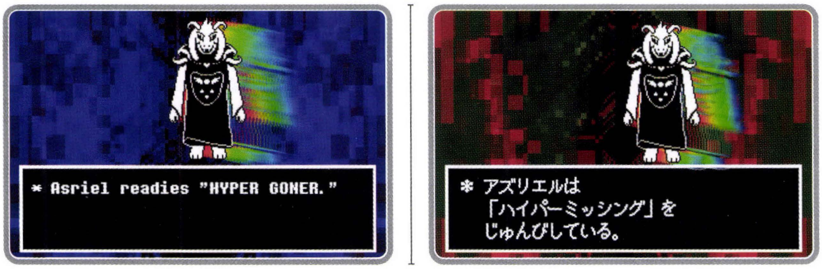


Asriel switches to using *boku* to refer to himself, and the more familiar pronoun *kimi* to say "you"

Because the original English text didn't include any such pronoun changes at all, it's clear that the translator viewed Asriel's dialogue through Asriel's eyes when translating his text, much as an actor might slip into their character's mindset before performing a scene.

Monument to Pre-Existence

Without a high level of cooperation between creator and localizer, references can easily be lost in translation

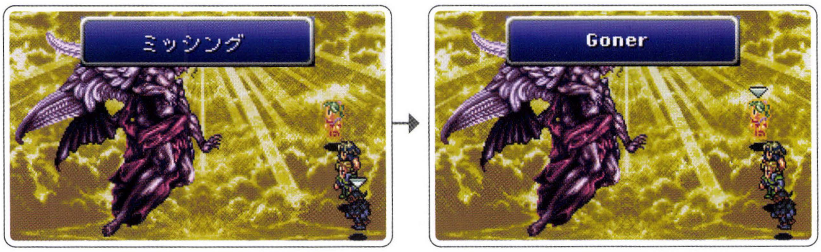


* Asriel readies "HYPER GONER."

＊ アズリエルは
「ハイパーミッシング」を
じゅんびしている。

Asriel unleashes a powerful attack known as "Hyper Goner" in English. Toby noted that this is a reference to the final battle in *Final Fantasy VI*, in which the godlike villain uses his ultimate attack – known as "Goner" in English – when his defeat draws near. Toby also noted that it wasn't important to retain this reference in the Japanese script – he only asked that the Japanese name for "Hyper Goner" should sound "extremely powerful and cool".

The "Goner" attack in *Final Fantasy VI* was originally known as "Missing" in Japanese



Although it was unnecessary, the localizers did preserve this classic *Final Fantasy* reference. But because "Goner" was known in Japanese as "Missing", Asriel's "Hyper Goner" was localized into Japanese as "Hyper Missing".

Umm...

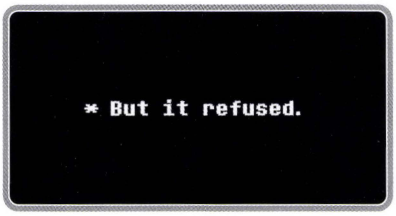
Perhaps I should set these depressing topics aside and share a Japanese recipe instead. One of the best down-home recipes in Japan is Japanese curry. It's basically a warm, hearty stew with vegetables or meat or anything else, but with a rich, mouthwatering flavor. I want it to finally be popular where I'm from, so I hope you'll try making some sometime!

オージーカレー
O.G. CURRY
SAUCE MIX カレーソースミックス
MED. HOT 中辛
NET WT. / 内容量 7.8 OZ (220 g)
12 SERVINGS (12 皿分)

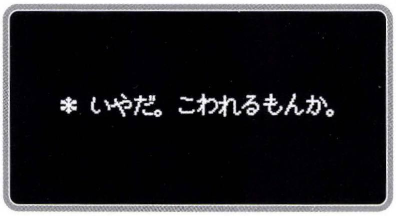
Find Japanese curry blocks at your local store and then drop them in any soup or stew

Japanese curry is even better with steak, mashed potatoes, dipping bread, and/or rice!

Double Refusion



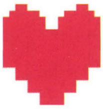
* But it refused.



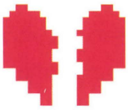
＊ いやだ。こわれるもんか。

Again, we see Toby's fondness for phrases with extra meanings that are difficult to retain in translation

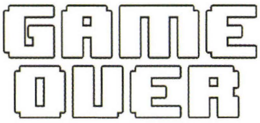
Normally, if the player is defeated during battle, the character's soul – represented as a red heart – shatters into pieces. This is then followed by a standard game over screen:



Upon defeat, the main character's soul is surrounded by darkness



The soul breaks apart and shatters



The game over screen appears

If Asriel defeats the main character in battle, this same heart-shattering scene plays out again. But instead of going to the usual game over screen, the heart pieces recombine and a new message appears:

> *But it refused.*

Toby explained that this short sentence carries two separate meanings:

1. "Refused" can mean "refused to die"
2. "Refused" can mean "re-fused", referring to how the heart fragments fuse back together again

Toby understood that this pun would probably be difficult to retain in Japanese, so he noted that Meaning #1 was more important to preserve. As a result, this line was given a straightforward to translation in early versions of the Japanese script:

> *But the SOUL couldn't be broken.*

After some more internal discussion, the localization team switched the line from an outside narrator's explanation to a first-person exclamation:

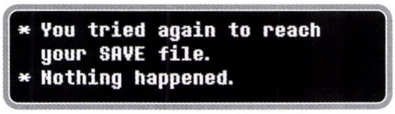
> *No! I won't be broken!*

This Japanese wording – combined with the first-person perspective – evokes the sense of holding on to strong resolve against all odds, which is a common "final battle" theme in classic Japanese RPGs. Thus, the final Japanese line uses very different grammar and wording to parallel the meaning and intent of the original English line.

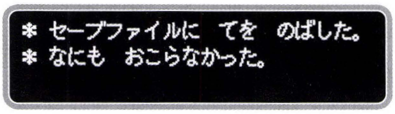
Multiple Saves

It's revealed that whoever has the most "determination" in the Underground is able to use the in-game save menu functions. In other words, the most determined person in the Underground can freely load and save their progress. This is what allows the player to save and load their progress, just like in any other game. Except here, it's the actual, physical player's determination that enables this ability. The main character is just along for the ride.

Toby begins by using "save" in a noun-like way related to computers ▸



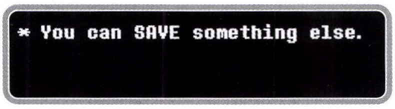
* You tried again to reach your SAVE file.
* Nothing happened.



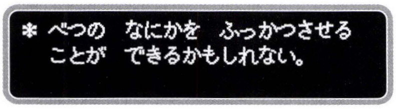
＊ セーブファイルに てを のばした。
＊ なにも おこらなかった。

During this final battle, Asriel absorbs and corrupts the souls of Sans, Papyrus, Undyne, and every other important story character. With all this new power, Asriel immobilizes the main character *and* takes control over the save menu. This becomes clear when the player reaches out for the save file, only to fail.

Toby switches to using "save" as a verb and with a very different meaning ▸



* You can SAVE something else.



＊ べつの なにかを ふっかつさせる ことが できるかもしれない。

After the player fails to reach the save file a second time, the game offers a hint about focusing on saving the characters whose souls have been absorbed:

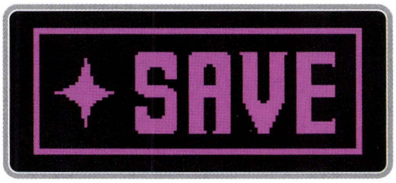
> *You tried to reach your SAVE file. Nothing happened.*
> *You tried again to reach your SAVE file. Nothing happened.*
> ...
> *But... Maybe, with what little power you have...*
> *You can SAVE something else.*

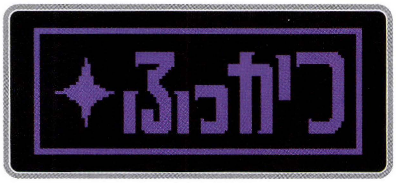
As we can see, the English word "save" in this scene carries multiple meanings:

- "Save" is used to refer to the player's save file and the ability to load it
- "Save" is used to mean "give salvation to someone's soul"
- "Save" is used to mean "to physically rescue someone"

Toby and the localization team spent a lot of time on preserving this wordplay in Japanese. After trying a number of solutions, the team settled on using the Japanese word *fukkatsu* in place of "save". In general, *fukkatsu* means "to revive" or "to restore", but it can also be used to mean "to restore/load a saved file" and "to restore something back to how it should be".

A new menu icon had to be created to work properly with the new Japanese wording of this scene ▸





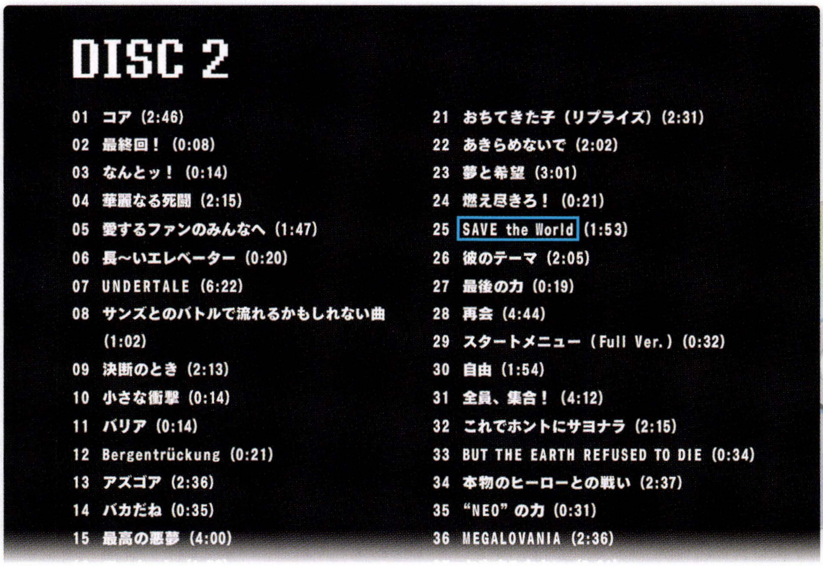
Although the choice to replace “save” with *fukkatsu* solved most of the wordplay issues, it also slightly altered the logic of the scene. To compensate for this change, the team added an extra line that bridges the jump from “save” to *fukkatsu*. Thus, the final Japanese scene became:

> *You reached for your save file. But nothing happened.*
> *You reached for your save file again. Nothing happened.*
> *It appears you can’t restore your save file after all.*
> …
> *But… If you gather what little power you have left…*
> *Maybe you CAN restore something else.*

This creative localization choice allowed the Japanese scene to approximate the wordplay in the original English scene. This choice did create new issues to be tackled, however:

1. The in-game “SAVE” icon needed to be redrawn to say *fukkatsu* in Japanese
2. The new icon needed extra programming to load properly based on the player’s chosen language
3. Dropping the word “SAVE” from the scene broke the connection to “SAVE the World”, the official English title of this scene’s background music track

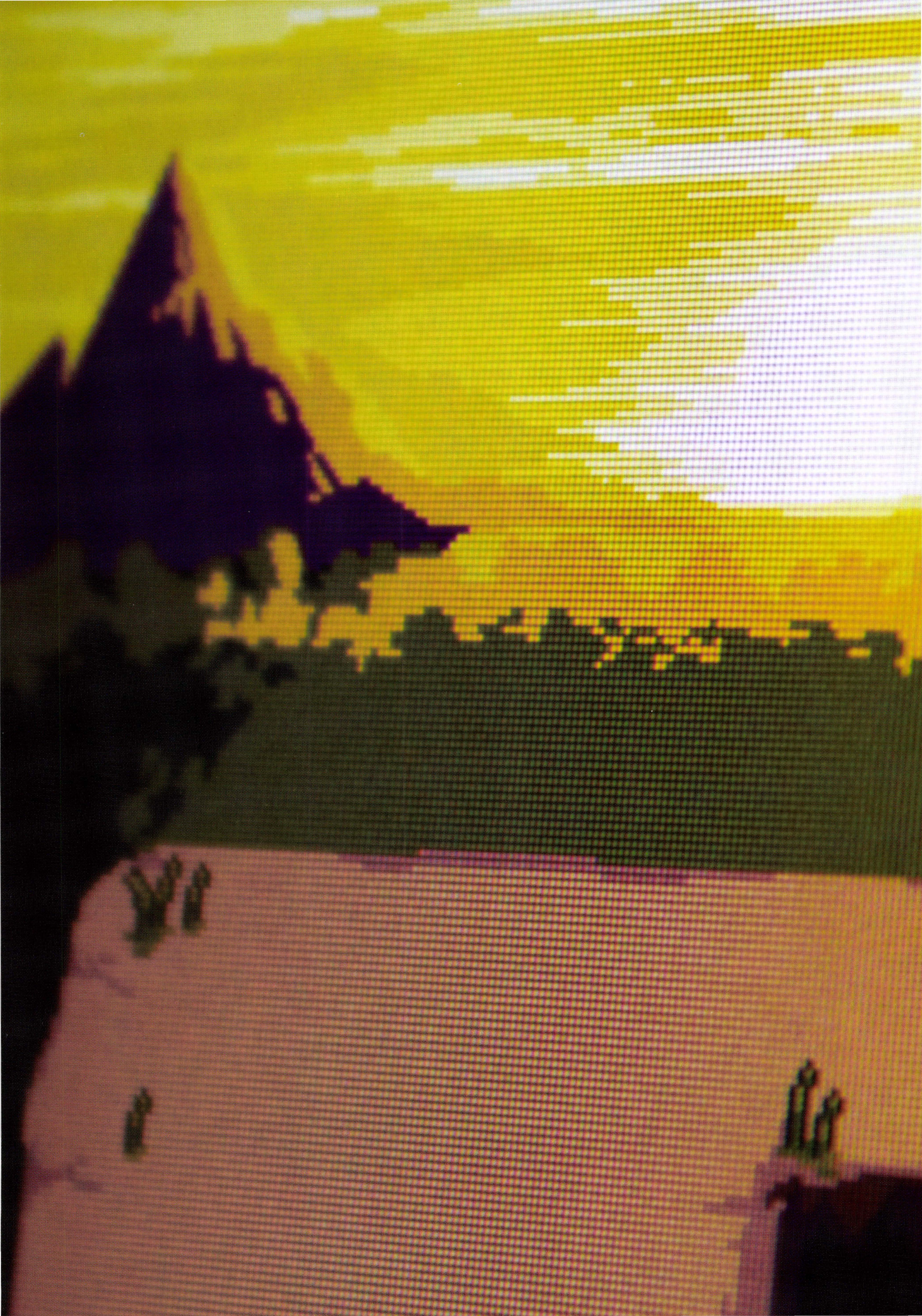
The localization team easily fixed the first two issues. The third issue came into play a year after *Undertale*’s Japanese release, when the game’s official soundtrack was set to be released in Japan. Because this track is so iconic and memorable, Toby requested that the Japanese soundtrack retain the “SAVE the World” name as-is rather than replace it with a less memorable pun on *fukkatsu*.

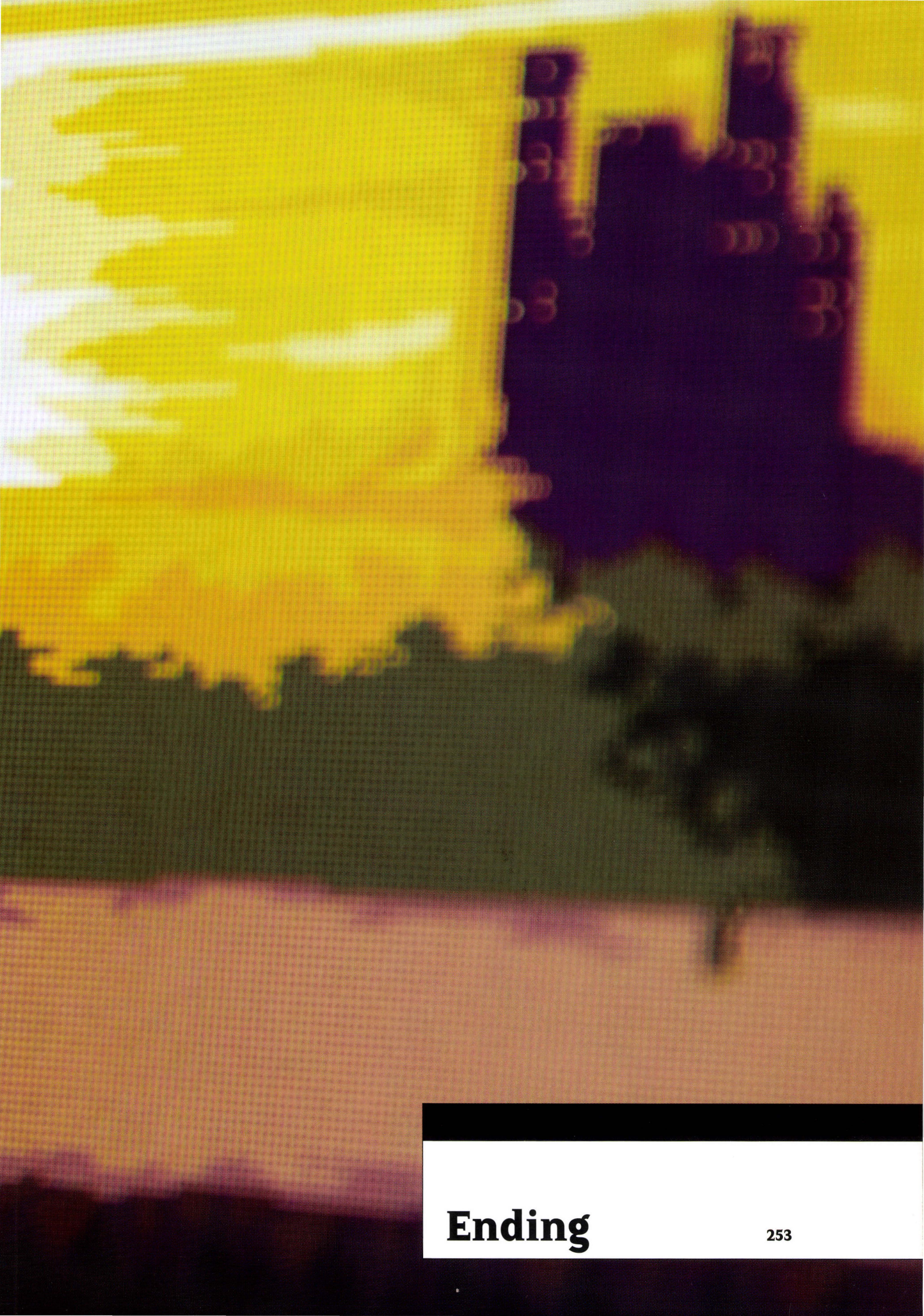


DISC 2

01 コア (2:46)
02 最終回！ (0:08)
03 なんとッ！ (0:14)
04 華麗なる死闘 (2:15)
05 愛するファンのみんなへ (1:47)
06 長~いエレベーター (0:20)
07 UNDERTALE (6:22)
08 サンズとのバトルで流れるかもしれない曲 (1:02)
09 決断のとき (2:13)
10 小さな衝撃 (0:14)
11 バリア (0:14)
12 Bergentrückung (0:21)
13 アズゴア (2:36)
14 バカだね (0:35)
15 最高の悪夢 (4:00)
21 おちてきた子 (リプライズ) (2:31)
22 あきらめないで (2:02)
23 夢と希望 (3:01)
24 燃え尽きろ！ (0:21)
25 SAVE the World (1:53)
26 彼のテーマ (2:05)
27 最後の力 (0:19)
28 再会 (4:44)
29 スタートメニュー (Full Ver.) (0:32)
30 自由 (1:54)
31 全員、集合！ (4:12)
32 これでホントにサヨナラ (2:15)
33 BUT THE EARTH REFUSED TO DIE (0:34)
34 本物のヒーローとの戦い (2:37)
35 “NEO” の力 (0:31)
36 MEGALOVANIA (2:36)

◀ Every choice you ever make as a translator or localizer has the potential to bite you in the butt years later in unexpected ways





Ending

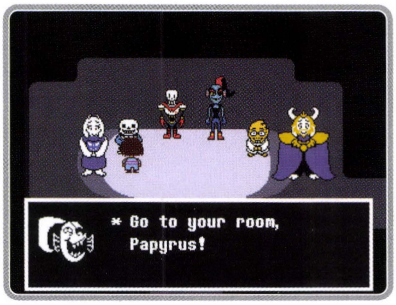
Ending

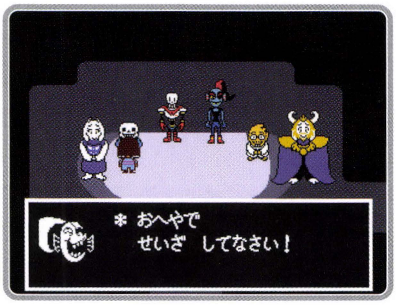
Human Victorious! Underground Beholds New Under-Tale!

At last, the main character reaches the end of the journey. All that lies ahead is freedom, destruction, delight, or death. The Underground's final fate rests in the player's hands.

In Big Trouble Now

Reader Challenge #10: Come up with three alternatives from your region that could replace "go to your room!"


* Go to your room,
Papyrus!


* おへやで
せいざ してなさい!

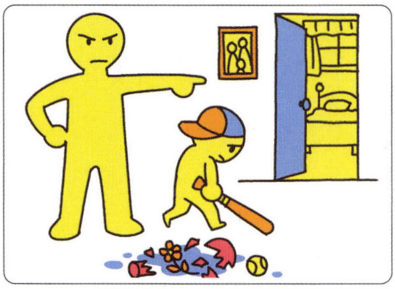
Undyne jokingly pretends to be Papyrus' mother. She scolds him in English by saying:

> *Don't talk back to me like that! Go to your room, Papyrus!*

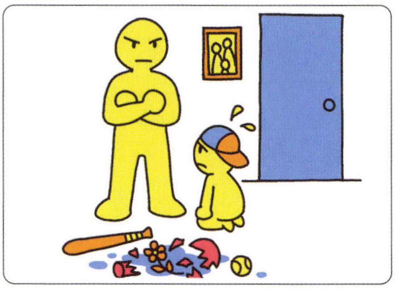
In some English-speaking cultures, it's common for parents to punish their children by sending them to their room. This punishment is less common in Japan, however, so Undyne gives Papyrus a slightly different punishment in Japanese:

> *Don't give me that back-talk! Go to your room and sit down* seiza*-style!*

In Japanese, *seiza* refers to a formal sitting style in which a person kneels on the floor, sits back on their heels, and pushes the tops of their feet flat on the ground.



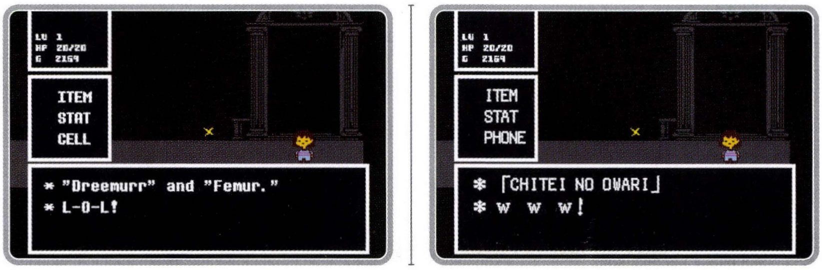
Sending a kid to their room is a common punishment in some Western cultures



Sitting *seiza*-style for a while can be so painful that the Japanese government recently passed a law declaring it a "morally unacceptable form of punishment"

Because this posture limits blood circulation and compresses nerves in the legs, sitting *seiza*-style becomes painful after a short time. This is why the *seiza* sitting style is sometimes used as a punishment for misbehaving children.

Banding Together



* "Dreemurr" and "Femur."
* L-O-L!

* 「CHITEI NO OWARI」
* w w w!

Now that I think about it, the "CHITEI NO OWARI" name nicely fits the context of nearing the end of *Undertale*

In the English script, Toriel sends the main character a bad joke via text message:

> *If Sans and I started a band, do you know what we could call it?*
> *"Dreemurr" and "Femur."*
> *L-O-L!*
> *PS – That is only a joke. Do not refer to me as Dreemurr*

The joke here is that Toriel's last name, "Dreemurr", rhymes with "Femur", which is a type of large bone. This joke would be lost in a literal translation into Japanese, so the translator replaced it with something new:

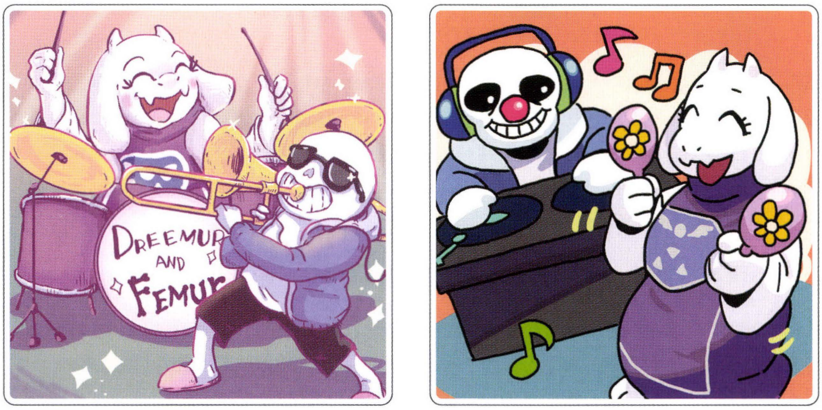
> *If Sans and I started a band, what do you think its name would be?*
> *"CHITEI NO OWARI"*
> *LOL!*
> *PS – I'm thinking of having Sans be our DJ.*

The name "CHITEI NO OWARI" ("End of the Underground"), is a reference to "SEKAI NO OWARI" ("End of the World"), a Japanese band that achieved incredible popularity in the 2010s. In this way, the untranslatable joke of the original text was replaced with a comedic reference to a real-life band.

TOKYO MUSIC ODYSS

Say hello to the members of SEKAI NO OWARI

This small change in this small line has resulted in an unexpected side effect: Japanese fans now associate Sans with being a DJ. So while English-speaking fans might draw Sans playing musical instruments as part of "Dreemur and Femur", Japanese fans often portray him as the DJ for "CHITEI NO OWARI".

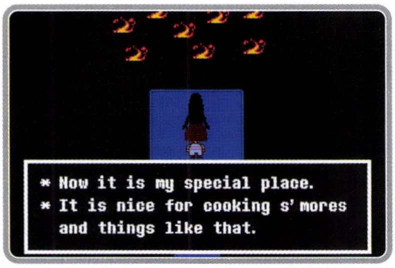


LEFT: An illustration of "Dreemur and Femur" by an American fan

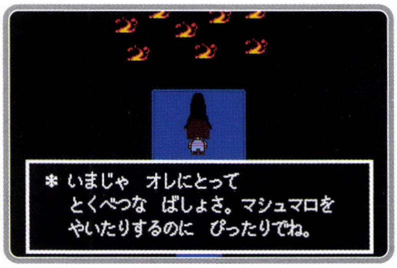
RIGHT: An illustration of "CHITEI NO OWARI" by a Japanese fan

Playing with Fire

Incidentally, Japanese people love to cook Japanese-style "curry rice" over campfires, it's like the default camping meal – try it sometime!



* Now it is my special place.
* It is nice for cooking s' mores
and things like that.



＊ いまじゃ　オレにとって
とくべつな　ばしょさ。マシュマロを
やいたりするのに　ぴったりでね。

In the Core, a creepy monster explains its fondness for a creepy pit of fire:

> *Now it is my special place. It is nice for cooking s'mores and things like that.*

Traditional s'mores are made with graham crackers, chocolate, and marshmallow toasted over a campfire

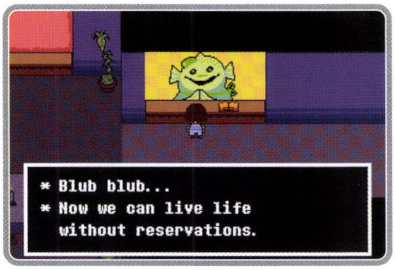
Cooking s'mores over a campfire is a common tradition in some English-speaking regions. This practice isn't as widespread in Japan, however, so the reference to s'mores was altered slightly:

> *It's a special place to me now. It's perfect for roasting marshmallows and stuff like that.*

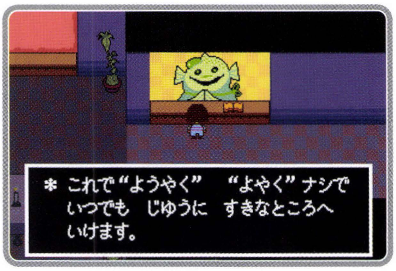
As we can see, the s'mores reference was replaced with a reference to roasting marshmallows over a campfire, which *is* a more common practice in Japan.

Jokes in Reserve

The localization team turned this untranslatable English pun into a Japanese joke that hits three goals simultaneously



* Blub blub...
* Now we can live life
without reservations.



＊ これで“ようやく”　“よやく”ナシで
いつでも　じゆうに　すきなところへ
いけます。

The monsters in the Underground are now free to venture out into the human world. Back at the MTT Hotel, a reservation-obsessed receptionist says in English:

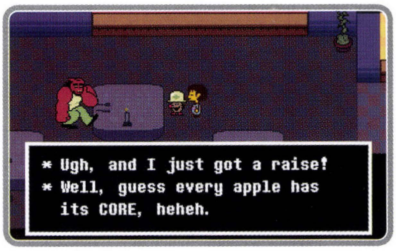
> *Now we can live life without reservations.*

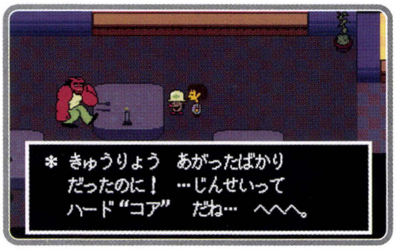
This line is a pun on the phrase "without reservations", which normally means "without any worries" but also means "without making advance arrangements" in this case. Because this English pun would be lost in a literal translation, the localization team replaced it with a Japanese pun on the words *yōyaku* ("finally") and *yoyaku* ("reservations; advance arrangements"):

> *We can finally go wherever we want without needing reservations.*

This new line accomplishes three things: it conveys the surface-level information of the original line, it parallels the wordplay of the original line, and it preserves this character's uniqueness as the hotel's "annoying reservation guy".

Dual Core


* Ugh, and I just got a raise!
* Well, guess every apple has
its CORE, heheh.


＊ きゅうりょう　あがったばかり
だったのに！　…じんせいって
ハード“コア”　だね…　へへへ。

I wonder how many times apples have come up in this book so far

A construction monster in the Core laments his luck. In English, he says:

> *So, if we're leaving, will my job...? Ugh, and I just got a raise!*
> *Well, guess every apple has its CORE, heheh.*

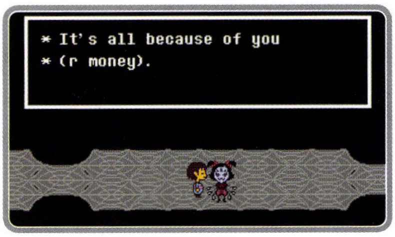
This final sentence uses figurative speech that means "all good things have a downside" or "you gotta take the good with the bad". The line also contains a pun on the phrase "apple core" and the place known as the "Core".

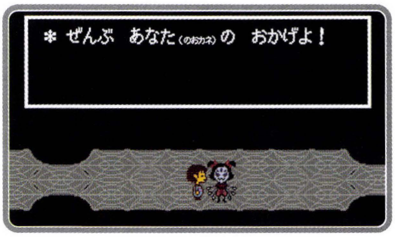
Because the Japanese language has its own word for apple cores, the wordplay in this line would be lost in a straightforward translation. To compensate, the translator replaced the apple core pun with something completely new:

> *If everyone's going to the surface world, what'll happen to my job...?*
> *Ugh! And I just got a pay raise, too!*
> *Boy, life sure is hardCORE. Heheheh.*

This new line closely parallels the original line in content and intent: the monster reluctantly accepts his situation while making a pun about his old job.

Small Business Donor


* It's all because of you
* (r money).


＊ ぜんぶ　あなた（のおカネ）の　おかげよ！

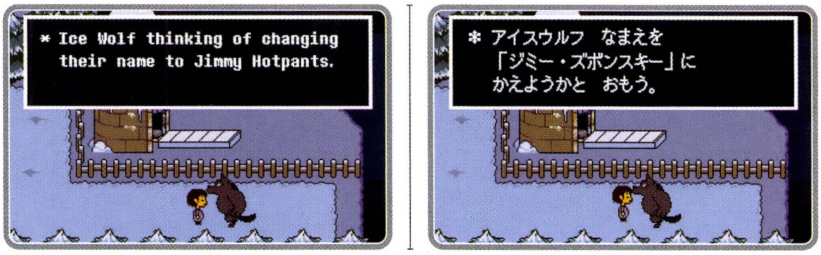
For reference, you need to spend over 100 Gold to get this message

Muffet thanks the player for spending so much money at her bake sales throughout the game:

> *It's all because of you*
> *(r money).*

To make this spelling joke work in Japanese, the translator first gave the line a literal translation. Because this pushed the "(r money") part to the middle of the sentence instead of the end, the localization programmer then modified the game to display "(r money)" in its own tiny font. The result looks different from the original English line, but achieves a similar, comical effect.

Fashion Statement


* Ice Wolf thinking of changing their name to Jimmy Hotpants.

＊ アイスウルフ なまえを 「ジミー・ズボンスキー」に かえようかと おもう。

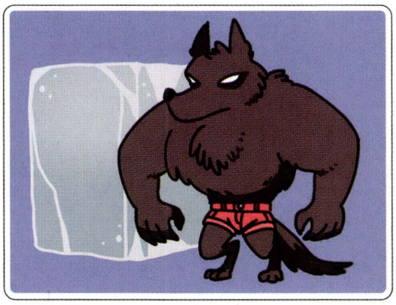
Ice Wolf also speaks with fragmented Japanese grammar to mimic the phrasing of Ice Wolf's English dialogue

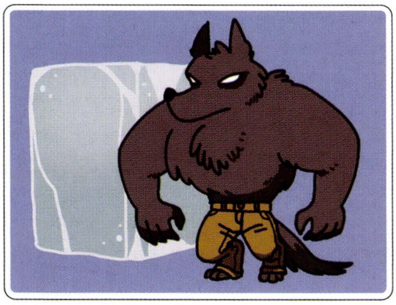
A monster named Ice Wolf is glad to finally have a break from throwing ice cubes all day as a job:

> *Ice Wolf can take a break to buy some pants now.*
> *Ice Wolf thinking of changing their name to Jimmy Hotpants.*

The name "Jimmy Hotpants" comes from a personal experience Toby had during a game of laser tag. Apparently, the top scorer at one point was named "Jimmy Hotpants", and the name was so ridiculous that it stuck with Toby long after.

In laser tag, you shoot light guns at other players and hope they don't shoot you first


The name "Jimmy Hotpants" evokes the image of very short shorts like these


The name "Jimmy Zubonski" evokes the image of ordinary, full-length pants

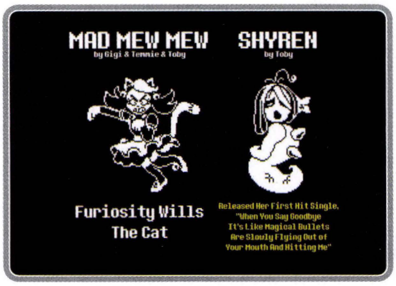
The ridiculous sound and associated imagery of the name "Jimmy Hotpants" would be dulled in a literal transcription into Japanese. As such, the translator altered the name to "Jimmy Zubonski", which contains three levels of wordplay:

- "Jimmy Zubonski" sounds like a plausible, real-life Russian name
- "Zubonski" is a play on the Japanese word *zubon* ("pants")
- "Zubonski" is also a play on the Japanese word *suki* ("to like; to love")

In this way, the Japanese version of this line preserves the original joke in tone and humor. At the same time, it arguably surpasses the humor of the original line.

On a mostly unrelated topic, a rare practice in localization is something I call "reverse localization". As an example, let's pretend you're translating a Japanese game into English. But instead of translating like normal, imagine that what you're looking at is actually a Japanese translation of something that was originally in English. It's then your job to get as close to that "original" text as possible. Naturally, this requires an incredible amount of experience and skill to accomplish successfully.

Clawful Cattitude

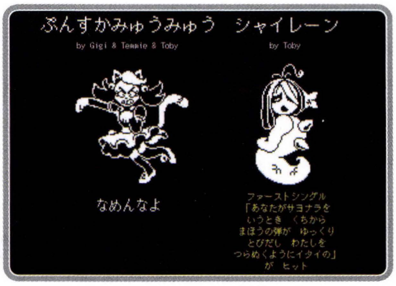


MAD MEW MEW
by Gigi & Temmie & Toby

Furiosity Wills
The Cat

SHYREN
by Toby

Released Her First Hit Single,
"When You Say Goodbye
It's Like Magical Bullets
Are Slowly Flying Out of
Your Mouth And Hitting Me"



ぷんすかみゅうみゅう
by Gigi & Temmie & Toby

なめんなよ

シャイレーン
by Toby

ファーストシングル
「あなたがサヨナラを
いうとき　くちから
まほうの弾が　ゆっくり
とびだし　わたしを
つらぬくようにイタイの」
が　ヒット

Random trivia: I've noticed my cats tend to boop their noses on people as a way to say "Hey. You."

A secret monster named Mad Mew Mew appears in the Nintendo Switch version of *Undertale*. Mad Mew Mew is a catgirl doll possessed by the spirit of a revengeful enemy named Mad Dummy. During the game's ending credits, Mad Mew Mew's name is accompanied by the phrase:

> *Furiosity Wills The Cat*

This line is a two-pronged play on the English proverb "curiosity killed the cat". It contains a comical rhyme on the classic proverb, and it points to the fact that Mad Mew Mew has been possessed by the spirit of Mad Dummy.

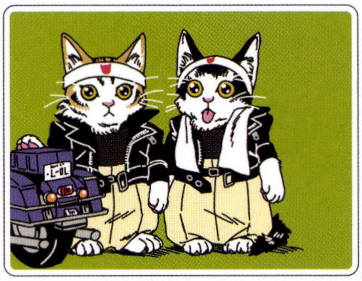
Because this English wordplay would be lost in a straightforward translation into Japanese, the translator replaced it with something completely different:

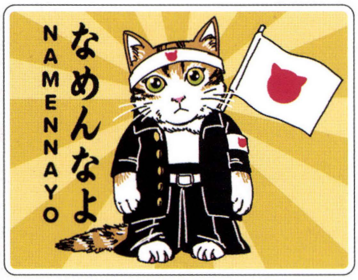
> *namennayo*

In this situation, *namennayo* could be translated as "don't screw with me" – it's the sort of thing you'd hear from a tough guy about to start a fight. The phrase comes from the word *nameru*, which can mean "to belittle" in some contexts and "to lick" in more ordinary situations. This line is also a reference to *namennayo*, a slogan of the *Nameneko* brand of cat-related entertainment.

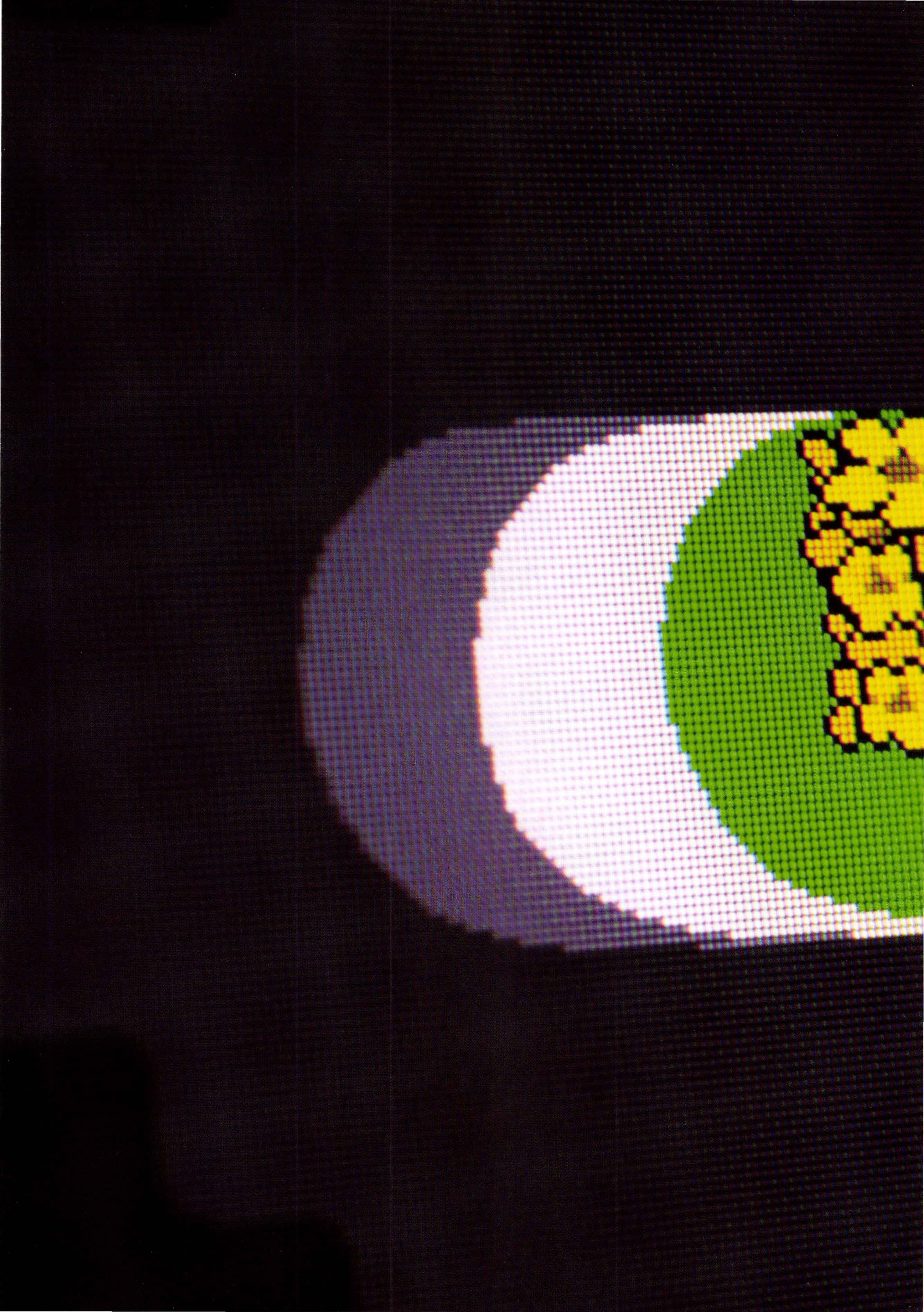
Overview of *Nameneko*

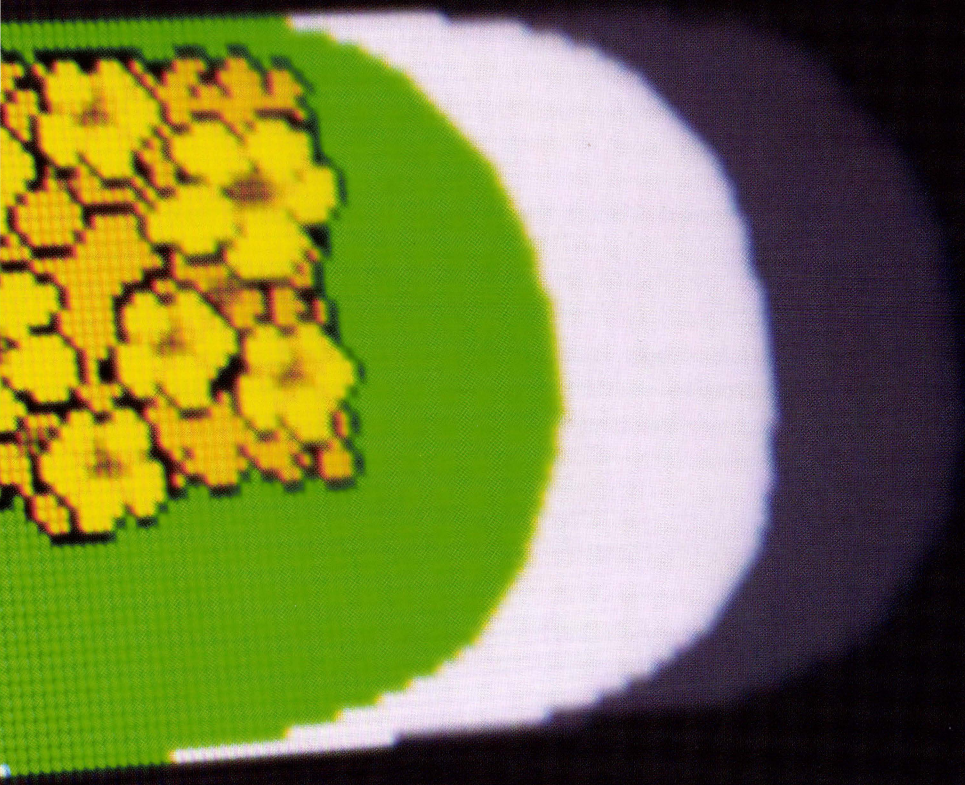
In the early 1980s, a Japanese photographer became famous for his photos of cats acting like tough ruffians. These photos exploded in popularity and were packaged into books and merchandise under the *Nameneko* brand name. The *Nameneko* fad was so big that the brand was even released internationally, under names like "Pelorian" and "Don't Pelorian".





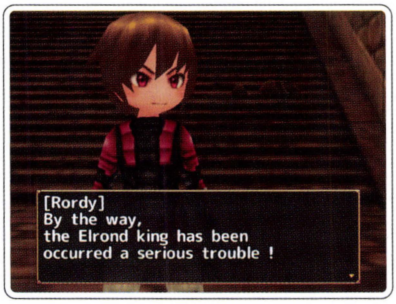
I couldn't get the rights to any *Nameneko* photographs, so please enjoy these illustrated badass kitties instead





Final Thoughts

Final Thoughts



[Rordy]
By the way,
the Elrond king has been
occurred a serious trouble !

Top-notch localization work can be hard to come by, so it's heartening to see an indie game like *Undertale* receive such lavish treatment

Over the past 240 pages or so, we've looked at the history behind *Undertale*'s localization and its official Japanese release. We've studied the changes that were made during the localization process, why those changes were made, and how those changes affected the player's experience.

We've also seen how culture and language are so closely tied together that sometimes a literal translation just isn't possible. We've examined how a single localization choice can affect the gameplay experience in surprising ways. And we've seen examples of how a localized piece of text can improve or surpass the original text. This look at *Undertale*'s English-to-Japanese localization has been a real learning experience.

What We've Learned About Translation and Localization

In addition to learning about *Undertale*'s localization, we've learned a lot about translation and localization in general. Some key discoveries include:

- **Translation isn't simply replacing all the words in one language with all the words in another** – it involves intent, figurative meaning, functional meaning, emotional impact, cultural background, artistic nuance, and more
- When something will otherwise be lost in a literal or straightforward translation, **localization can preserve the original intent for the target audience**
- **Different forms of translation have different limitations** – games, for example, have technical, computer-related limitations that sometimes affect the final product, just as movie subtitles must be short and simple enough to be read in the time allotted
- **Translation also involves psychological biases** like "imprinting" and notions that a translation can only ever be inferior to the source material
- **Translation theory is very different from translation reality** – every translation decision has its own unique challenges with unique solutions

I guess all of this is a fancy-pants way of saying that translation isn't black and white at all – it's more like red and green and yellow and smurple, all stuck together with melted bubble gum, motor oil, and that ball of tangled wires you keep in a box somewhere. Even so, a good translator can navigate the mess and make things work.

What I've Learned

Although I was only on the sidelines during most of *Undertale*'s English-to-Japanese localization, watching everything come together was an enlightening experience for me. I learned just as much while writing this book too.

My biggest challenge was finding a way to explain *Undertale*'s English-to-Japanese translation for readers who know nothing about *Undertale*, video games, translation, the Japanese language, or Japanese culture. Packaging all of these complex topics in a clear, understandable way took so long that I basically ended up rewriting this book twice over the course of several years.

Anyway, looking back now, it feels like I just finished taking *and* finished teaching a two-semester university course on media translation. Hopefully this look at *Undertale*'s localization has been educational and entertaining for you, too.

I also had to devise my own writing style guide, which I'll call the "Legends of Localization Style", or "LoL Style" for short. You basically ignore other style guides and just do whatever makes the most sense for your situation – but try to remain consistent throughout.

Loose Thoughts

There were many other topics I had hoped to cover in this book, but could never find quite the right place to put them. So here are a few other points of interest if you've come this far:

- Think of localization as redrawing an existing painting, but with different tools – it's like if you tried to redraw the Mona Lisa with crayons or markers instead of paint. You could do a really good job, but it's still going to be different in the end, no matter what
- Because most localization choices are essentially personal choices, and because different target audiences usually have different expectations, it's probably not possible for a "perfect, universal localization" to exist
- I've only covered a hundred or so *Undertale* localization changes in this book, but there were actually *thousands* of other, smaller localization issues that had to be solved. Had I covered every localization issue at my usual level of detail, this book would be about 18,000 pages long and weigh approximately 128 pounds (56 kilograms)
- If you're fixated on only one or two lines in a full-scale localization, keep in mind you're probably only looking at like 0.01% of the entire thing
- Note that "entertainment Japanese" is quite different from "real-life Japanese" and shouldn't be used in real life unless you know what you're doing
- It could be fun to make a Japanese version of this book, but it would probably be a bit different, as I'd need to explain American culture everywhere instead of Japanese culture

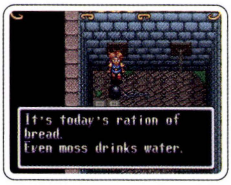
I'm pretty sure I did the math right

Legacy

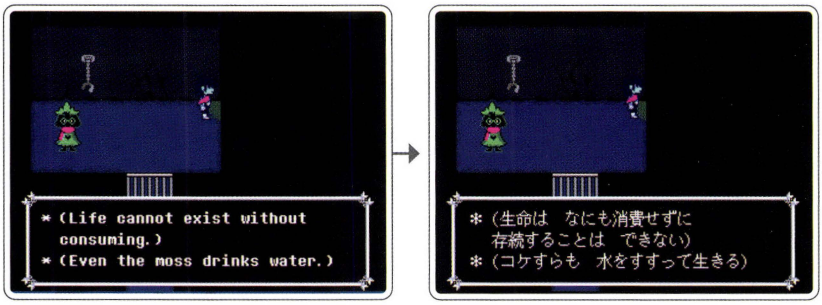
As we've seen, *Undertale*'s Japanese localization has impressed Japanese players, game developers, and critics alike. The localization's success has even inspired others to follow Toby's path of turning a simple hobby into a full-fledged career, much as *EarthBound*'s Japanese-to-English localization did for Toby nearly thirty years ago. Games are usually localized to make money, but now we're seeing how localization can start a cycle of inspiration that crosses the language barrier.

Surprisingly, the legacy of *Undertale*'s localization doesn't end here. *Undertale* continues to grow and change as Toby adds new content, which 8-4 continues to localize into Japanese. Toby and 8-4 also continue to collaborate with the Japanese game industry and the Japanese fan community long after *Undertale*'s Japanese release. They're also working more closely than ever on new projects like *Deltarune*, Toby's latest game creation.

In short, the teamwork that Toby and 8-4 developed during *Undertale*'s localization has transformed their basic business relationship into something greater: a genuine bond of friendship and trust.

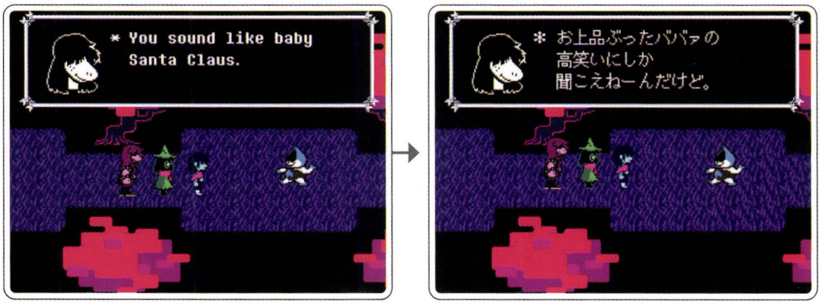

It's today's ration of
bread.
Even moss drinks water.

"Suck moss if you want water" was mistranslated as "Even moss drinks water" in *Illusion of Gaia*


* (Life cannot exist without
consuming.)
* (Even the moss drinks water.)

＊（生命は　なにも消費せずに
存続することは　できない）
＊（コケすらも　水をすすって生きる）

The English version of this *Deltarune* line includes an indirect reference to a memorable mistranslation in the classic Japanese RPG, *Illusion of Gaia*. This reference would be lost on most Japanese *Deltarune* players, however, so the localization team gave the line a straightforward translation that still conveys the content and mood of the English line

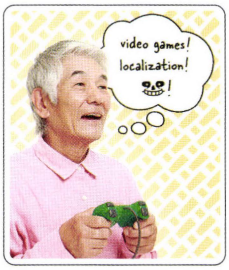

* You sound like baby
Santa Claus.

＊お上品ぶったババァの
高笑いにしか
聞こえねーんだけど。

Lancer has a unique "ho ho ho" laugh in both the English and Japanese scripts. In English, "ho ho ho" is closely associated with Santa Claus' laugh, but in Japanese, "ho ho ho" is more closely associated with the laughter of snooty rich ladies. As such, Lancer is compared to Santa Claus in the English script and a snooty old hag in the Japanese script

The Power of Three

In the world of *Undertale*, important things come in threes. The monsters, the humans, and the player. The three members of the Dreemur family. The three entities vying for control of the main character's body. Three main story routes. Three triangles in the Delta Rune. And so on.


video games!
localization!
!

If you've read the entire book all the way through, then I sincerely thank you and congratulate you

As I finish this book, I now see that the number three is important in localization too. Specifically, I see that there are three sides to any successful localization: the creator's side, the localizer's side, and the audience's side. Without all three sides, the final localization will be flawed, incomplete, or meaningless. If even one side is weak, the final localization will feel weak too. But if all three sides are present and solid, the resulting localization will shine brightly. I believe this holds true not just for games, but for any form of artistic transformation.

On occasion, I'll finish a lengthy localization analysis with some sort of final score or rating. I don't think that would be appropriate this time, given my personal involvement with the project. Instead, I'll just say that all three sides of *Undertale*'s Japanese localization are solid: the localization team brought experience and passion, Toby brought care and excitement, and the players brought support and respect. Without a doubt, *Undertale*'s Japanese localization is filled with DETERMINATION.

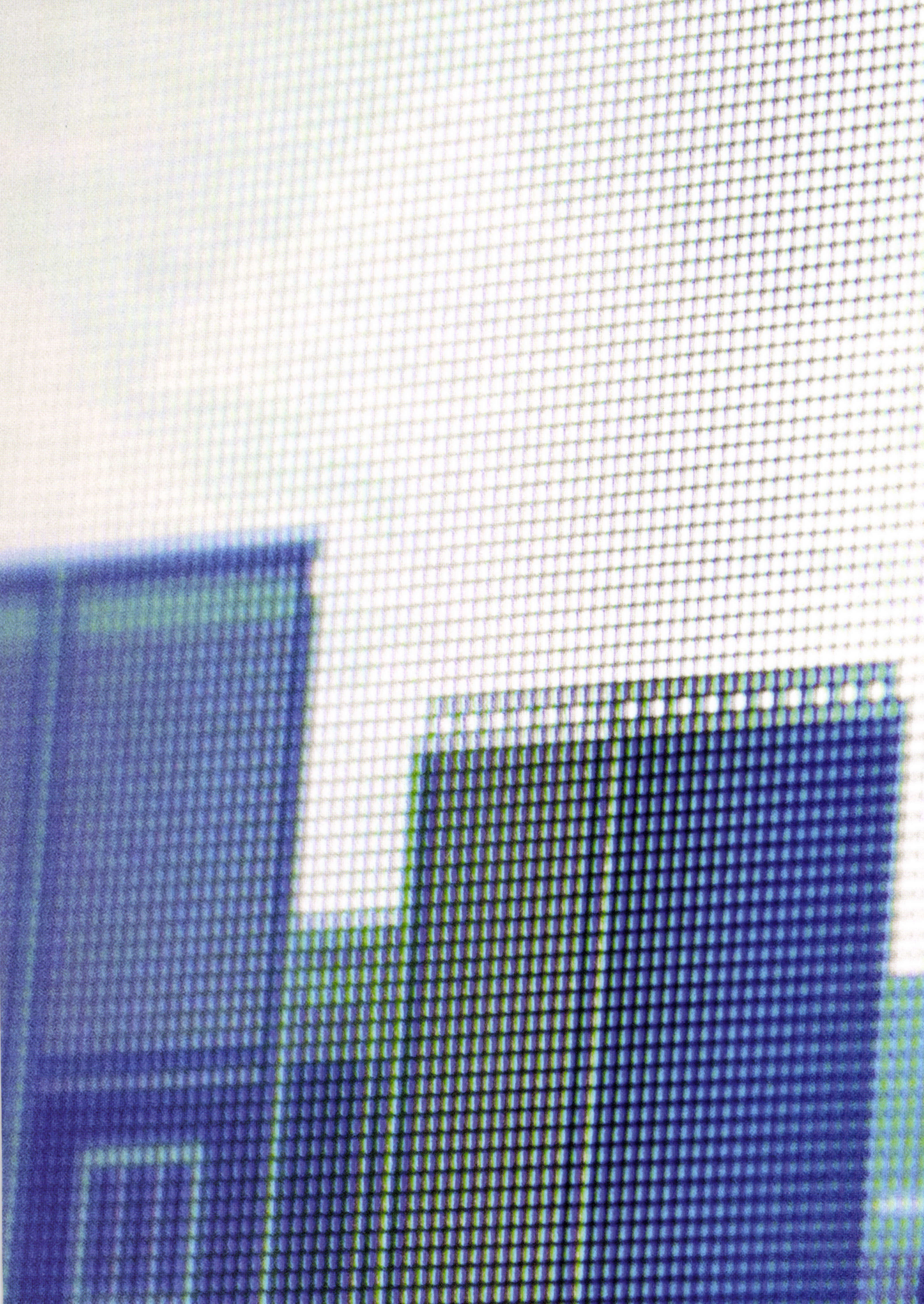
Your Turn

On a final note, I leave you two challenges before you close this book.

First, why do you think it's called "localization" and not something else like "globalization", "regionalization", or "culturalization"? Is there a better name that would work instead? The term "localization" is still relatively new and in flux, so who knows, maybe it'll go by a different name someday.

My second challenge to you is this: the next time you watch your favorite movie, read your favorite book, or listen to your favorite music, keep an eye out for things that would be lost in a straightforward, literal translation into another language. Then come up with a way to localize it somehow. Think of it as a game. Or a bad time. Nyehehe!

But seriously, if you do come across any cool localization changes in a game or whatever, share it sometime. I live for this stuff, and I'm always looking for more legends of localization!



Special Thanks

Special Thanks

This book, as you see it now, would not exist without the help of so, so many people. Thank you to everyone who helped make this impossible book possible!

All *Undertale* fans

Japanese fan translators (I tip my hat to you all)

Korean fan translators (I hope to learn Korean someday and play your translation)

Ade

Cocoa

さよよん (Sayoyon)

Maki

Fangamer Japan staff

Napster

Winny

Games&Symphonies

USDA

8-4 All Staff

256graph

Tony Kuchar

YoYo Games

Brian Jaworski

Dr. Steve Brule

Yuya Satō

Mark Reichwein

Lynn Johnston

The city of Osaka

Junior Jumble #18

Lindsay Moore

Eman

Masaya Tokuhiro

Andrew Davis

Laurel Lake

Las Vegas

Plains, Georgia

Djsmell

Hideyuki Watanabe

Satoru Iwata

Four out of five dentists

Luis "Eight Blackey" Guerrero

Riot Games

Kathy-chan

Thomas Moon Kang

Bandai Namco Entertainment Inc.

Lulu

Toymate

Jonathan E

That white dog that always blocks Toby's face

Makoto Yamashita

Derek Carmody

Carter Jaworski

Diana Gundacker

William Shakespeare

Pop Team Epic team

Oliver Rogue and Nash Taylor (OXR Studios)

Cartoon Network Latin America

Chris Warriner

Reset Media AB

Carissa Cornelius

NicoNico Douga

Onion Games

Shinya Arino

Masayuki Kibe

Zayed Gaming

Hanenashi Error

Hamburger Helper

Sean K.

Laura Verdin

Glico

Clara Osborne

Wikimedia Commons

Andrew Davis

Greg Lescoe

Shigesato Itoi

Banana Yoshimoto

Bob Barker

Inio Asano

Producers of Aisatsu no Mahō

Elpis

Mark Lentz

Peter Nestler, jumpropesecrets.com

Adrián Ronda Sampayo

Alex Arvizu

Yoshitsune and Benkei

Nadine's Bakery

Drew Wise

All of the GameCats

Touhou fans

Nintendo of America

SmashingRenders

🕈🖐☠☝👎🖐☠☝💧

Nickelodeon Animation Studios

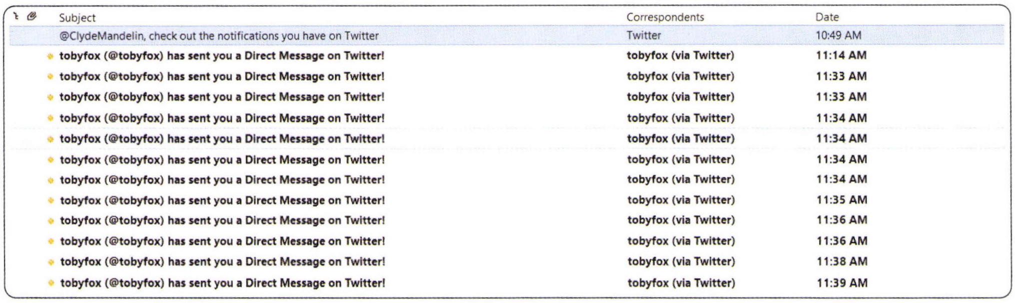
Sankyo

The cool PK Hack people

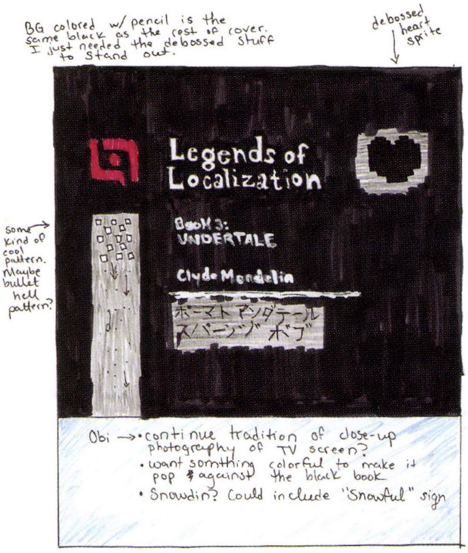
Final Reader Challenge: Write Your Name Below!

....

Hopes and Dreams



Subject	Correspondents	Date
@ClydeMandelin, check out the notifications you have on Twitter	Twitter	10:49 AM
tobyfox (@tobyfox) has sent you a Direct Message on Twitter!	**tobyfox (via Twitter)**	**11:14 AM**
tobyfox (@tobyfox) has sent you a Direct Message on Twitter!	**tobyfox (via Twitter)**	**11:33 AM**
tobyfox (@tobyfox) has sent you a Direct Message on Twitter!	**tobyfox (via Twitter)**	**11:33 AM**
tobyfox (@tobyfox) has sent you a Direct Message on Twitter!	**tobyfox (via Twitter)**	**11:34 AM**
tobyfox (@tobyfox) has sent you a Direct Message on Twitter!	**tobyfox (via Twitter)**	**11:34 AM**
tobyfox (@tobyfox) has sent you a Direct Message on Twitter!	**tobyfox (via Twitter)**	**11:34 AM**
tobyfox (@tobyfox) has sent you a Direct Message on Twitter!	**tobyfox (via Twitter)**	**11:34 AM**
tobyfox (@tobyfox) has sent you a Direct Message on Twitter!	**tobyfox (via Twitter)**	**11:35 AM**
tobyfox (@tobyfox) has sent you a Direct Message on Twitter!	**tobyfox (via Twitter)**	**11:36 AM**
tobyfox (@tobyfox) has sent you a Direct Message on Twitter!	**tobyfox (via Twitter)**	**11:36 AM**
tobyfox (@tobyfox) has sent you a Direct Message on Twitter!	**tobyfox (via Twitter)**	**11:38 AM**
tobyfox (@tobyfox) has sent you a Direct Message on Twitter!	**tobyfox (via Twitter)**	**11:39 AM**

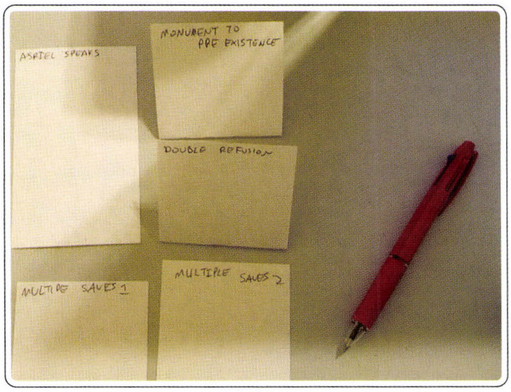

Legends of
Localization
Book 3:
UNDERTALE
Clyde Mandelin
ホーマトアンダテール
スパーンジ ボブ

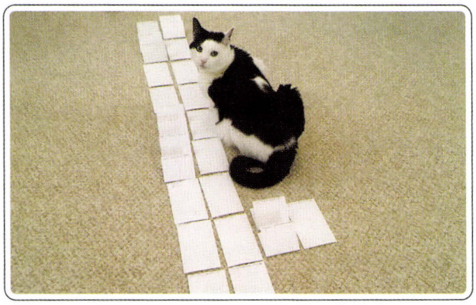
BG colored w/ pencil is the same black as the rest of cover. I just needed the debossed stuff to stand out.

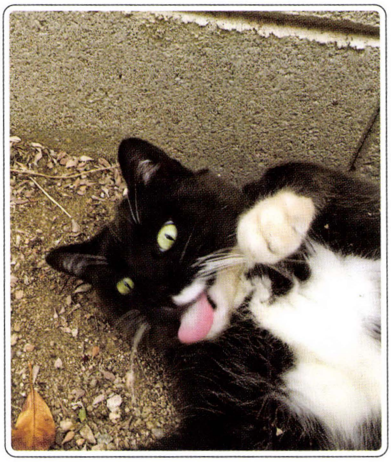
debossed heart sprite

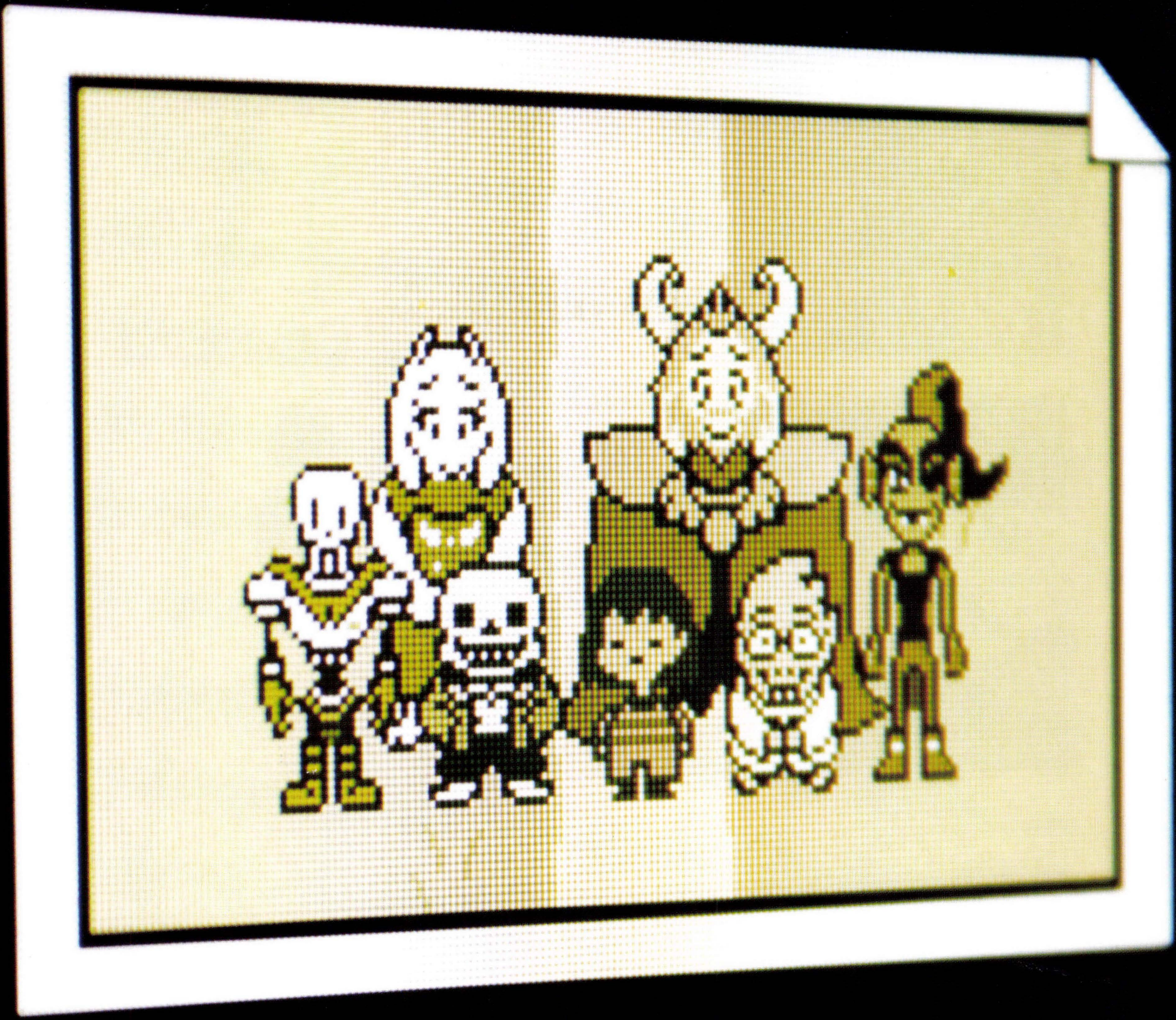
some kind of cool pattern. Maybe bullet hell pattern?

Obi →
- continue tradition of close-up photography of TV screen?
- want somthing colorful to make it pop ~~&~~ against the black book
- Snowdin? Could include "Snowful" sign

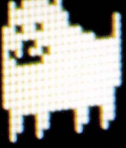

ASRIEL SPEAKS
MONUMENT TO
PRE EXISTENCE
DOUBLE REFUSION
MULTIPLE SAVES 1
MULTIPLE SAVES 2

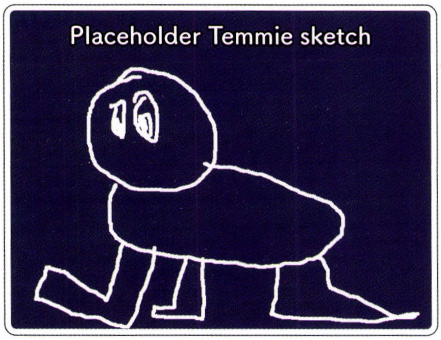




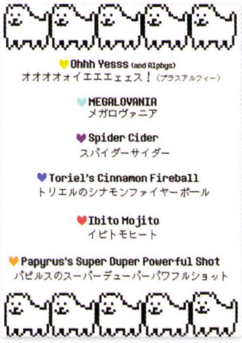


THE END




Placeholder Temmie sketch

ケツイ
UNDERTALE
FAN BOOK



♥ **Ohhh Yesss** (and Alphys)
オオオオォイエエエェェス！（プラスアルフィー）

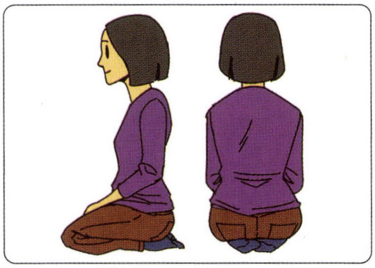
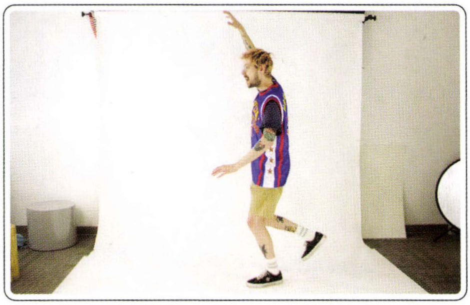
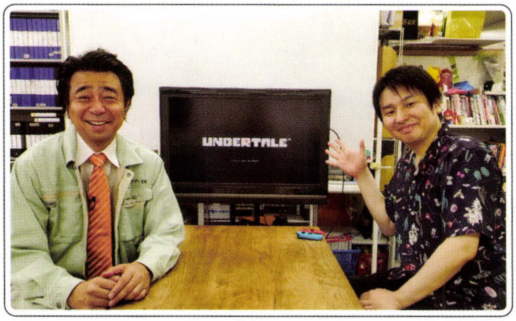
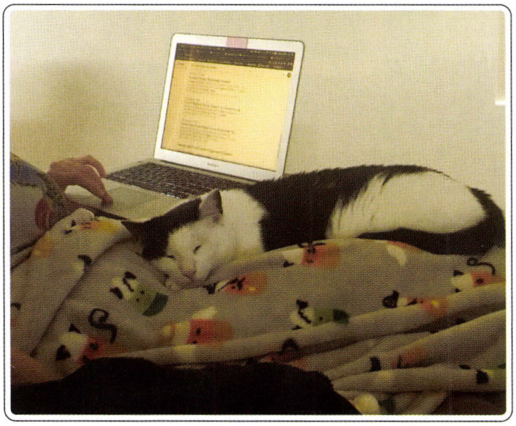
♥ **MEGALOVANIA**
メガロヴァニア

♥ **Spider Cider**
スパイダーサイダー

♥ **Toriel's Cinnamon Fireball**
トリエルのシナモンファイヤーボール

♥ **Ibito Mojito**
イビトモヒート

♥ **Papyrus's Super Duper Powerful Shot**
パピルスのスーパーデューパーパワフルショット

UNDERTALE
THIS WAY
UNDERTALE
NOT THIS WAY